

Visible Cities

Mauricio Rodas Espinel
Mayor of the Distrito Metropolitano de Quito

Pablo Corral Vega
Secretary of Culture

.....
CIUDADES VISIBLES / VISIBLE CITIES

This book was conceived during the *Seminario Internacional Periodismo, Vida Urbana y Resiliencia en América Latina* (International Journalism Seminar on Urban Life and Resilience in Latin America), organized by the Department of Culture of Quito, the Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI), and the CAF, on June 2-4, 2016. Participating in the seminar, in addition to the authors of the texts, were: Ricardo Corredor (FNPI), Jaime Holguín, Andrés Zamora and Flavio Vargas (CAF), Pablo Corral Vega, Claudi Carreras, and Boris Muñoz. Help with logistical coordination was provided by Jaime Beltrán, project coordinator of the FNPI.

Creative Directors
Claudi Carreras
Ramón Reverté

Editor
Boris Muñoz

Photo Editor
Claudi Carreras

Publication Coordinator
Lea Tyrallová

Executive Producer
Yolanda Escobar J.

Production Assistant
Gabriela Portaluppi

Design
Andreu Balias

Texts
Cristian Alarcón
Carlos Manuel Álvarez
María Fernanda Ampuero
Leo Felipe Campos
Mário Magalhães
Carlos Martínez
Patricia Nieto
Marcela Ribadeneira
Alejandra Sánchez Inzunza
Joseph Zárate

Photo Essays
Rodrigo Abd
Oscar B. Castillo
Darío Cortés
Maya Goded
Claudia Jaguaribe
Nicolás Janowski
Cristina de Middel
Federico Rios
Isadora Romero and Misha Vallejo
Adriana Zehbrauskas

Infographics
Jaime Serra

Translation
Gregory Dechant / Tom Gatehouse /
Dale Kaplan

Copy Editing
Fernando Quincoces

Copy Editing (photographers' texts)
Soraya Constante

Prepress
La Troupe

Printing
AG Palermo

Publisher
Editorial RM

RM
© 2016
RM Verlag, S.L.
Loreto 13-15, local B. 08029, Barcelona
España

© 2016
Editorial RM, S. A. de C. V.
Río Pánuco 141. Col. Cuauhtémoc
06500, México, D. F.
México
info@editorialrm.com
www.editorialrm.com

ISBN RM: 978-84-16282-85-2
DL: B 18589-2016
291
ISBN ECUADOR: 978-9942-14-833-9



fundación
nuevo
periodismo
iberoamericano

fnpi

QUITO
ALCALDÍA

Visible Cities

Editor

BORIS MUÑOZ

Photo Editor

CLAUDI CARRERAS

RM

IN THIS PROJECT we reflect on the Latin American city from a journalistic perspective. We have worked closely with the Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano, one of the most robust and respected institutions in Latin America, and with a group of experienced and respected journalists and photographers.

Latin America is the most urbanized region on the planet. Sustainable development will not be possible unless we create more inclusive cities, address vital social issues, and put the citizens themselves at the center of the debate.

Our territorial ordering plan for Quito proposes the construction of a smart, inclusive city, a city with opportunities for all. We dream of a green city, a compact city with multiple centers, a city that offers its inhabitants quality public spaces and orderly and efficient human mobility.

The efforts of municipal administrations are fundamental to the future of Latin America. Our cities are a focus of problems and inequities, but also a source of solutions and creative possibilities: in short, of hope.

Reflection on urban issues is necessary and urgent. Quito is the place that has been selected to propose a new urban agenda through the Habitat III Conference. Engaged and committed journalism, journalism that questions and investigates, is one of the essential tools in the construction of a democratic society and of more just and livable cities.

Dr. Mauricio Rodas Espinel
Mayor of the Distrito Metropolitano de Quito

LET US IMAGINE A GROUP OF INFORMED TRAVELERS, of *flâneurs* exploring the cities of Latin America. Let us imagine the dispatches they send us. Some are writers—from among our most respected—while others are well-known photographers. They send us their impressions, including the raw truth about how people live in the region, stories of death and despair, stories of human resilience. Photographers and writers work independently and send their dispatches from the places most akin to their various sensibilities.

It is perfectly possible to imagine a city that is the prototype of the Latin American city, a city that sums up all the cities of the region. A megalopolis that does not exist, but that could exist, a city whose traces are to be found everywhere.

At the present moment, more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and Latin America is the most urbanized region on the planet. The report of the Atlantic Council states that 80% of the population of Latin America lives in urban zones.

Habitat III is an opportunity for the world to reflect on the city and on sustainable urban development. Cities are spaces of creation, of creativity, of the construction of new paradigms, but they are also factories of inequality, violence, and marginalization.

The dispatches sent by our *flâneurs* are necessarily incomplete: they show aspects of the cities, they offer impressions. The city is a monster that cannot be grasped by any single person. It has so many heads and faces and appendages that we can only guess at its true nature. But out of these impressions we can imagine the potent, vibrant heart of Latin America. And that heart is urban!

The first conclusion we can draw from any reflection on the Latin American city is that, without taking social aspects into account, there can be no sustainable development. In other words, the most urgent task is to reduce exclusion, inequality, environmental degradation, hopelessness. Urbanization is a force that tends toward chaos, inequity, and the deterioration of the environment.

We have chosen five themes as guiding threads in these reflections on the Latin American city: gender, the environment, inclusion, security, and resilience.

Gender is doubtless the most neglected issue. Violence against women and women's circumstances of marginalization and inequality must be confronted with courage. There is no excuse, in the twenty-first century, for gender violence and discrimination still to exist.

The environment is the most pressing issue, because it comprises all the other themes. A degraded city, a polluted city, is a city that generates violence. Quality of

life is directly linked to the environment. Is air and water quality satisfactory? Are we surrounded by trees and green spaces? How do we process our waste? Urban planning which does not mitigate the catastrophic effects of environmental degradation, which does not design quality public spaces, is doomed to failure. Without shared spaces of high quality, the city does not exist: it doesn't breathe, doesn't play, doesn't celebrate, doesn't commune with itself.

Inclusion is the opposite of exclusion, and exclusion is the most powerful force in urbanization. Exclusion may not only be economic or social, but also cultural. It is the *invisibilization* of others... and in Latin America, "others" are frequently in the majority.

Security is our most cherished wish, a need of all those of us who inhabit a Latin American city. Inequality and degradation generate violence, a structural violence which cannot be addressed by the implementation of a police state which controls and watches, but only by the creation of participative processes, vital public spaces, community polices, and above all better opportunities for those who are without them at present. Unfortunately, security monopolizes the attention of those of us who live in cities: it slows us down, it paralyzes us.

Resilience, finally, is the ability of urban conglomerations to survive, to adapt to the challenges and traumas that beset them, and to overcome. The first and greatest type of resilience is natural organization: the creation of human systems which actually work, against all odds, which resemble more and more closely a natural ecosystem. Resilience, one might say, is the ability of urban systems to overcome their own tendency toward degradation through cohesiveness, cooperation, solidarity: resilience in the face of tragedy, of an earthquake, for example, but also resilience in the face of hopelessness and violence.

This project is a reaffirmation of journalism's power to inform us about essential aspects of the urban agenda, of its power to question the powers that be and to shake us out of our apathy.

The *flâneurs* we have mentioned are journalists, professional dilettantes, chroniclers in words and images, led by the brilliant Venezuelan writer Boris Muñoz and by the well-known Catalan curator Claudi Carreras, in collaboration with a potent institution: the Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI).

The Department of Culture of the Distrito Metropolitano de Quito has facilitated encounters and built bridges so that, through journalism, we can revisit our Latin American cities. The city may be an open wound, but it is also the source from which our extraordinary power springs, the roots of our culture and our unbridled will to live.

Dr. Pablo Corral Vega

Secretary of Culture of the Distrito Metropolitano de Quito

CITIES FOR THE TELLING

FUNDACIÓN GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ PARA EL NUEVO PERIODISMO IBEROAMERICANO — FNPI

Jaime Abello Banfi, *General Director*

Ricardo Corredor, *Executive Director*

MOST LATIN AMERICANS live in a city. This fact is so obvious that we tend to forget its deep implications for all of our lives. We are the most urbanized region in the world, and this makes each of us a different kind of person and of citizen. It is that simple and that powerful.

It is impossible, particularly in the discipline of journalism, to escape this fact. What does it signify for this discipline, service, industry of informing? Perhaps the most obvious effect is that urban life requires a constant, growing, unbridled flow of information, on all kinds of subjects, and preferably available at people's fingertips, by means of a keyboard or the screen of a smartphone.

We need information about everyday practical matters such as traffic, the interruption of public services, urban security, or the weather, to mention but a few. But we also require information about more strategic or policy-related matters, such as territorial ordering plans, the use of local budgets, and economic forecasts for our cities and regions.

Both the amount of data and the ease of access to important information about cities has increased exponentially, and in the face of this avalanche we are led to ask: What is our role as journalists? Are we your traffic police, your miners, your collectors, your transformers? What does it mean to be a journalist in an age of excess information, of successive tides of countless data, and of citizens who need to understand and make use of the data in their daily lives?

But it is not all data and flow charts. There are also the reportages on urban life, the individual and collective stories, the micro- and macro-narratives, the popular and official mythologies, the strategies of political communication and of civic culture, the spaces to be explored outside of conventional formal and legal frameworks: a whole complex network of things that finally configure our notions of city and the inhabitants' own imaginaries of themselves, of the territory they inhabit, and of the territories others inhabit.

"To be human is to be urban," said an anonymous and ironic young man from Medellín in the 1990s. Perhaps saying it the other way around (to be urban is—or should be—to be human) is a key to understanding the notion, so important that the United Nations established it as number 11 of its Sustainable Development Goals: "Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."

These global concepts and policies, along with others, will play a role in the great international urban encounter, Habitat III, in Quito, an event organized every twenty

years and to be held for the first time in Latin America. It is the reason behind the publication of this book.

The FNPI and Journalism on Urban Themes

For twenty-one years now, the Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI) has devoted its main efforts to promoting quality journalism, and urban themes, treated from a range of different perspective, have never been outside our scope.

Most of the 866 activities we have engaged in between 1995 and the beginning of 2016 have taken place in more than sixty cities all across Latin America, starting with the site of the foundation's headquarters, Cartagena de Indias, but also in large capital cities, including Quito, where we have held six workshops and seminars, and in medium-sized cities and smaller towns.

García Márquez chose Cartagena as the location of his foundation in part because it is of a manageable size, where you can go out on the street, do your reporting, and return to the workshop a few hours later with material of your own, a city with its problems, issues, and tensions, but not a megalopolis in which getting around is complicated.

Over the years, we have organized workshops in all the great Latin American capitals. Since the setting for our training activities is necessarily a city, the urban conglomeration has become an object of the practical exercise that characterizes our methodology.

A couple of examples. The program "New Routes of Cultural Journalism," which we organized in Mexico with the support of Conaculta, in cities such as Tijuana and Mérida, required participants to do practical work on the cultural life of those places. The project "Journalism to the Neighborhood" has been a valuable opportunity for journalists all over Latin America to get to know the Nelson Mandela neighborhood on the outskirts of Cartagena, as both a metaphor and a laboratory for working in so many poorer neighborhoods, which in Latin America will often border on islands of urban infrastructure and development.

We have also held workshops and seminars aimed specifically at covering urban themes, such as the workshop seminar in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, organized in collaboration with the CAF (the Latin America Development Bank) and the Open Society Foundations, devoted to citizen safety, and the encounter on "Journalism, Resilience, and Urban Life," organized in Quito in collaboration with the city's Department of Culture and the CAF in June of 2016.

In all of these cases we have found that the cities offer an extraordinarily wide range of challenges and opportunities to journalists, being as they are dynamic and complex entities, almost like living organisms, in a permanent state of change and evolution.

Gabo and His City

It is worth recalling how Gabriel García Márquez, the creator of his foundation, described his first encounter with Cartagena in 1948, in the first and only volume of his memoirs *Vivir para contarla* (*Living to Tell the Tale*):

We had reached the great gate of El Reloj. For a hundred years there had been a drawbridge that connected the old city to the outlying district of Getsemaní and the dense slums of the poor from the mangrove swamps, but it was raised from nine at night until dawn. The population was left isolated not only from the rest of the world but also from history. It was said that the Spanish colonists had built that bridge because of their terror that the poverty-stricken from the outskirts would sneak across at midnight and cut their throats as they slept. But something of its divine grace must have remained in the city, because it was enough for me to take a step inside the wall to see it in all its grandeur in the mauve light of six in the evening, and I could not repress the feeling of having been born again. (trans. Edith Grossman)

What has happened in this city in which we live and work, over the almost seventy years since Gabo first set foot in it, is a reflection of many of our Latin American cities, which have grown explosively in this period, with insufficient planning, but which are now trying to progress and consolidate themselves, without having been able to close up the social breaches and resolve the internal tensions created by centuries of history.

May the words of our founder serve as a preamble to the magnificent portraits and accounts of the new generation of journalists and photographers who have contributed to this book. They inspire us to continue fostering a new quality journalism that is committed to sustainable development.

We would like to give our special thanks to the Department of Culture of the city of Quito, in the person of Pablo Corral, for allowing us to continue approaching the urban theme through this project, and to the CAF–banco de desarrollo de América Latina, both for its support for this project in particular and for an alliance extending over the last fourteen years, which has allowed us to work in a permanent and consistent manner on these subjects. Indeed, the urban theme, with all its complexities, remains a central priority of our strategic plan for the years 2016–2021.

MAKING THE CITY VISIBLE

Boris Muñoz

TWO MONTHS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE that, on April 16th, 2016, razed Portoviejo, as well as other towns in the province of Manabí, Ecuador, Wilden Macías opened the doors of his new retail outlet Almacén Roxana's. It is a modest replica of the original, which was located in the center of the town and was destroyed by the earthquake. Wilden doesn't care that the new location is actually the garage of his former father-in-law's house. What matters is how he has become a survivor, lifting up his new Portoviejo business out of the rubble of the old one. "You know that we *manabitas* are very positive," Macías told María Fernanda Ampuero. "They say the best soldier is the one who just keeps getting up again. Well, we have gotten up again and again."

In a neighborhood in San Salvador, a handful of teachers and parents promote a truce between the two gangs that govern the city so that their children can go to school. Meanwhile, in the Santa Ana neighborhood of Havana, Yoandri Marzo is uncertain whether to flee to the United States on a raft or to build a house in a mangrove swamp, which sporadic flooding, the destruction of the ecosystem, and climate change are threatening to destroy. In Quito, a group of women have decided to make their way as taxi drivers in spite of the machismo of their clients and the prejudices of society. And in Caracas, a former gang member condemned to a wheelchair tries to keep a basketball school going as the homicidal bullets of two rival gangs whistle past his ears.

As Borges reminds us in a passage of *The Book of Sand*, although the plain is always one and the same, no two hills are alike. Something similar could be said of cities: the city is one, but no two cities are identical.

This is obvious in Latin America, a region with great cultural and geographical diversity, which today is the most urbanized in the world. For decades it was believed that urbanization would progress under the aegis of modern rationality, moving us further and further from barbarity, as if this were something endemic to the countryside, the forest, and the plains. One need not look very far, however, to see that things have not turned out that way. Urbanization has put no end to barbarity, and neither has it translated into more harmonious cities.

The checkerboard grid of the colonial city and the developmental model are both paradigms of past centuries, when cities were little more than large villages governed by a select minority. Population growth and modernization led those minorities to attempt to expand the city by means of consumption. These fundamentally hierarchi-

cal paradigms saw their finest hour before the decline and fall of the cultivated city, but they do not help to understand the contemporary city, connected economically and electronically to globalizing processes. This has forced us to acknowledge past idealizations, something which in turn, from a more positive angle, has allowed us to understand central issues formerly veiled by classism, social immobility, and the cosmopolitan pretensions reserved to an elite: Latin America is not only the most urbanized region on the planet, but also the most inequitable.

Inequality has countless consequences and ramifications, many of which become endemic and apparently insoluble problems over the long term. We have cities today in Latin America that have been marked by decades of degradation and violence, others that face the challenges of accelerated modernization, and still others feeling the consequences of sudden but destructive bonanzas, of environmental deterioration, poor planning, uncontrolled immigration from rural areas, and the catastrophic forces of nature.

As cities become increasingly more complex and institutional capacity to cope with the different aspects of this complexity diminishes, certain forms of reaction become more common or inevitable: crime, informal mechanisms, marginalization, authoritarianism, atavistic behaviors. The most disturbing aspect of these reactions is not only that they make us doubt the tenacity of the inhabitants of the city in confronting them. There is something even more serious: they render invisible the potential of urban life, undermining the notion of the city as a space of converging individual opportunities and general wellbeing.

What Are Cities?

It is understandable that Latin American cities are perceived through their negative aspects, through the dark aura that surrounds them, and identified as synonyms of chaos. But that it is not the whole story. Over the last two decades we have also seen cases of urban renaissance that could almost be described as miraculous, such as that of Medellín, rescued from the abyss of terrorism. And there are other cities currently going through their best times ever. These examples illustrate something more or less intuitively understood: the city is too complex, too varied, to be reduced to a formal model or a single discourse, whether apocalyptic or utopian. Even on the timeline of progress there is a surprising overlap of different layers of time, in some cases quite radical. It is precisely the asynchronicities that oppose the process of modernization. To express it in Enzenberger's terms, the city is the ideal space in which to witness the zigzag of history.

And this tension tends to escape the gaze of those who formulate urban policy.

The city is also the expression of a longing. This is why cities continue to act as magnets for large numbers of migrants. It is in cities that opportunities for personal growth and the sense of belonging to the contemporary world are concentrated. In his famous essay "What is a City?" Lewis Mumford, one of the major urban critics of the

twentieth century, observed that a city is “a geographical plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social realism, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity.” Mumford related this group of elements, arguing that their interaction creates an “urban drama” and that this drama—understood as a personal and collective odyssey—is what makes cities a focus of attraction for most human beings.

By the same logic, if the city is the expression of the dreams and deep desires of individuals and communities, being a city-dweller, a citizen, is therefore a task, a creation. The geographer David Harvey puts it in these terms: “The right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights.”

Acts of Resilience

This idea can be projected to help us give meaning to our present. The inhabitants of the city keep seeking in it the meaning of the odyssey of their lives, because the city keeps offering the possibility of individual affirmation amidst (and in the face of) the multitude. The search for that individuality within the collectivity has a thousand facets, but in many cases it is expressed through acts of resistance against dynamics that overwhelm us as persons and on which, at first glance, they have—or seem to have—little or no influence. Even so, these urban Ulysses persist in their quests: at times alone and at times through alliances that help to cope with the challenges, travails, and prejudices of a dimension that can be described as brutal, monstrous, and titanic.

These individual and collective odysseys that unfold in the space of the Latin American city of the early twenty-first century are the guiding thread of *Visible Cities*.

The travelers (writers and journalists) in this book are called *cronistas* in Spanish: “chroniclers.” They do not explore cities as settings, but rather as a means to finding stories that would otherwise remain untold, invisible. Their work is to discover the city as it is experienced by its inhabitants, beyond public or official accounts. Their research—their reporting—is defined by an awareness that the city whose story they are going to tell is a palimpsest. They can help to express the frustration, rage, and dreams of people and communities that are victims of various circumstances, but at the same time they know that they are not the spokespeople of any final truth about what they have seen, just like their predecessors, the *cronistas de Indias*, the first Spanish chroniclers of the New World. They are, in the best of cases, heterodox travelers.

The stories these cities contain are sometimes exposed, in the open air. They may take place, for example, on the street, which tends to be the setting for gang violence, as in the case of the war between the Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18. The spatial expression of this conflict is an apparently inflexible territorial demarcation that impedes the residents of a zone dominated by one gang to cross into the territory of the other, and vice versa. Sometimes a resident of one or the other of the zones crosses an invisible line, not realizing he or she has trespassed across a literally lethal border.

In order to tell this story, Carlos Martínez, a.k.a. the apocalyptic rhapsodist, became a notary of the social expressions of the dispute, as for example the disappearance of the fatal number 13 from the rosters of Salvador soccer teams. Every neighborhood in San Salvador, or even certain sections of the same neighborhood, can become a battlefield of these rivalries. Guided by the gang members themselves, the apocalyptic rhapsodist describes how the strict division of the dominions of each gang is expressed by means of a green line. Nevertheless, his greatest discovery is of the efforts of ordinary residents to transcend the absurd but lethal boundaries that the checkerboard of letters and numbers of the Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18 impose on the daily lives and educations of their children. Sometimes apparently absurd acts, such as seeking a truce between sworn enemies, can help to keep hope alive.

At an opposite extreme, so to speak, Mário Magalhães traces the slow flow of urban migrations and the creation of a community through the voices of the residents of the Vila Autódromo in Rio de Janeiro. In his visits to the zone, the traveler is confronted with the resistance of a group of settlers to the demolition teams entrusted with tearing down the houses they had erected brick by brick over a period of years. They resist the caterpillar tractors bringing forced urban modernization in anticipation of the 2016 Olympic Games, as they raze not only their houses, but also their memories and their livelihoods. By telling the stories of Heloisa Helena Costa and Maria da Penha, Magalhães explains the geographical determinism of a city divided into zones of privilege and zones of exclusion, even going back a hundred years to tell the story of the formation of the famous hillside *favelas*, where veterans of the War of Canudos established their homesteads. Through the struggle of the inhabitants of Vila Autódromo not to be uprooted once again, not to be bulldozed once again, Magalhães epitomizes the long history of all those in Rio de Janeiro who have had to confront forces stronger than they are... and who have sometimes managed to win. "I built my house to live in, not to negotiate with!" exclaims Penha. The indomitable fertility of the land, which continues producing fruits and flowers, in spite of the assault of the demolition equipment, serves as an allegory of human perseverance.

Nevertheless, resilience, the ability to keep on going in the face of trauma or the structural injustices of society, is not always of a collective or epic nature. The paths of resilience are many and strange, but the chronicler succeeds in following them. If we dig a little deeper, we find resistances that bring about enormous social change in an apparently discreet and quiet way. Marcela Ribadeneira has discovered those little acts of resistance in a small group of women taxi drivers who, without banners or slogans, struggle to make their way in an exclusively male world. Her account reflects an effort to read the city as it presents itself at every traffic light and in the stories and prejudices of every passenger. Work experience, routine, hope, conventionalism, and sexual harassment are summarized in the stories of this small group of women taxi drivers, always on the move but not always willing to talk. This exploration of Quito through a woman's eyes is an invitation to the inhabitants of the city to open their own eyes and to abandon their arch-conservative and atavistic attitudes.

But the exterior can be a place of deceptive transparency. Its settings and atmospheres, its obvious situations, act as a veil that conceals the story as it is experienced by its protagonists.

In the little village of Nazareth in the northern Peruvian province of Bagua, a group of Awajún indigenous people suddenly becomes the epicenter of an absurd oil fever. But not because large oil reserves have been found on their land. The sudden prosperity comes from the exorbitant wages paid by the state-owned oil company to the indigenous workers, many of them children, for cleaning up the spill from an old pipeline winding through the rain forest like a metallic snake. Some members of the community begin to make money as never before in their lives, build new houses, and open businesses. But the smell of the “devil’s excrement” reveals that the black plague has contaminated the river and lands that are the community’s sustenance. Although the Amazonian “storytellers” are a reference to a remote or legendary past, Joseph Zárate, the author of this account, goes to the little village to hear the stories of the townspeople—their social adventure—and to connect them with the modernity experienced by a capital city of ten million people, such as Lima.

Another exemplary case of the phenomenon of false transparency can be found in the account of Caracas by Leo Felipe Campos. Miguelón, the central figure, is a typical young man in one of the most violent cities in the world. At the age of twelve he is asked to obtain a pistol by his father, who kills his lover and then himself with it. It is no surprise that by the age of seventeen Miguelón goes around armed, committing robberies and involved in lethal confrontations between rival gangs. By age twenty, he carries seven bullets in his body, one of which has left him confined to a wheelchair. The traces of the bullets mentioned in the title are also those of his passage through social and criminal violence, whether in the steep, narrow streets of his hillside neighborhood or in the ampler spaces of the city below. But demonstrating once again that a territory is not simply a map, the traces also evoke their opposite: the effort to escape the violence and to save others, if he can no longer save himself. From the basketball court where he presides as coach and mentor, the city of oil-fueled modernity seems a failure, with its congested freeways, ruined skyscrapers, and majestic mountain, like a great temple to which all the citizens of Caracas pay tribute. There, far from, yet very near, the parties and firearms that gave him power, Miguelón tells his stories, explaining but not justifying himself or asking forgiveness. His tale is a parable of the perpetrator turned victim, a parable whose moral applies not only to the life of the main character, but also to the city as a whole.

The Social Adventure

The *crónica* (the blend of narrative and reportage illustrated in these pages) is a way of recreating an experience, not simply a matter of *recounting* anecdotes, of processing information or data. This has always been and continues to be its distinctive aspect. Which is why these “chroniclers” go in search not only of facts, but of the word-of-

mouth that is the source of how events were actually lived. Unlike medieval jongleurs and tribal storytellers, our chroniclers tend to be urban creatures, usually based in big cities. And this leads us to a question: Is there really any single experience common to *all* the inhabitants of a city? The answer is no less true for being slightly tricky: the air they breathe.

Breathing the same air can be a dangerous proposition in Mexico City, where levels of toxicity have led to several environmental emergencies. But what is the air? What is it made of and how does it affect the organism when it's not healthy enough? What is more: is it possible to chronicle a city through something we cannot touch or see, but without which we cannot live, even if we never think about it? These questions underlie "Instructions for Breathing in Mexico City," by Alejandra Sánchez Inzunza. In her anatomical description of the city's air, she compiles some data: human beings breathe 21,000 times a day, and the air of Mexico City is not only composed of oxygen, nitrogen, and argon—without a definite form—but also of particles of sulfur dioxide, lead, and carbon monoxide, which with every breath are lodged in the liver, heart, kidneys, and brain. The air breathed in Mexico City is literally poisonous, causing 1,800 deaths and 4,500 hospitalizations in 2015 alone. These figures should incite a rebellion against automotive vehicles and fossil fuels. But this rebellion is a piecemeal, isolated affair, almost as invisible as the air itself. Some of these resistances have their crazy side, like the cyclists pretending to die of an attack of pollution, while others are actually temerarious, like the joggers who train in the "open air," knowing that lead is being embedded in their alveoli. In describing the conditions of the air, Sánchez Inzunza gives some really alarming news, such as the fact the city is not only one of the most populous on the planet, but also the one with the most cars. The vehicles parked around the Central de Abastos, the city's main distribution market, would fill seven hundred soccer fields. Theses could be written on the harmful effects of cars in combination with fossil fuels. Another example: the birds fall out of the sky. These facts may seem hyperbolic, but they are the simple truth, drawn from studies, statistics, and actual circumstances. They reflect an awareness which, not surprisingly, began with the efforts of a poet—Homero Aridjis—to protect people from being condemned to a (slow) death dictated by the air.

The chroniclers wandering through these pages also travel to medium-sized cities like Medellín, as well as to small or even tiny towns like Nazareth, or very remote and almost inaccessible places like Coyhaique. This is one of the aspects that gives this book a very particular interest. Geography also tells a story. The stories that emerge from the slopes of a mountain are not the same as those that occur in the rain forest or near the Antarctic, even when the same violence and the same prejudices envelop them.

In Medellín, a city scarred by wars between drug cartels, the armed forces, and paramilitary groups, many of the seven million people displaced by decades of civil war and other conflicts ended up in the hillside neighborhoods overlooking the city. Their original semi-rural settlements were transformed into the *comunas* of today. Some of these refugees struggled to climb out of poverty using the little the war had left them: their knowledge and skills in working the land. This is the story of

the female “orchard keepers” of Medellín, a struggle waged in silence that is told only long afterward, when someone like Patricia Nieto takes the trouble to weave and unweave the tangle of testimonies provided by Rosalba, Isela, Silvia, Luz, Gloria, and Berta. They arrived in Medellín and ended up on a piece of land next to Pinares de Oriente. There they combined their skills and knowledge to make the rocky soil, fields of uncultivated stubble, fertile again, planting almost 20,000 coffee plants, 7,000 yuccas, and 200 fruit trees. But Nieto’s narrative is not simply about the persecution, hunger, will power, and hard work that allowed a handful of women tired of feeding their children onions boiled with salt to transform themselves into urban farmers. The collective action of the *huerteras* of Medellín is one of those anonymous odysseys that unfold in cities and countries marked historically by exclusion. To make visible this facet of urban life is also to recapitulate the loss of innocence, family, and homestead. This multiple violence is a circular nightmare from which no one is immune, not even in the city. But the land is also a place where the traumas of the past can be healed.

In Coyhaique, in the extreme south of Chilean Patagonia, one of the southernmost human settlements in the hemisphere, violence and trauma are not an endpoint, but a starting point. With rigor, Cristian Alarcón reconstructs, like a detective, the case of Nabila Nahuelcar, an instance of gender violence in which the victim miraculously escaped death. But this is a peculiar case: the detective-narrator does not have to find the perpetrator, because he has already been identified. His name is Mauricio Ortega and he is behind bars. Alarcón tries to understand the reasons that drove him to commit his atrocious crime, reconstructing the crime scene and the hours leading up to it. We move to the living room of Nabila’s house. We see her drinking with friends and listening to music that bores her. Nabila and her husband sink into a drunken night that culminates in a heated argument and attempted murder. Now, what is behind this unfinished murder is precisely the city. A small town, rather, but beset by all the problems of any Third World megalopolis: inequality, poverty, machismo, pollution, prostitution. The rates of sexual abuse are twice as high as in the rest of Chile and domestic violence is people’s daily bread. At times, readers may feel they have entered an accursed neighborhood at the outer limits of civilization. Tedium vitae is ubiquitous and tangible. The air is poisoned by the smoke from the coal the inhabitants use to keep warm. When everything is mixed together, Coyhaique becomes a pressure-cooker that boils over, all too often, with fearful savagery. Cristian Alarcón makes us see Coyhaique as if it were a fishbowl illuminated by a diagonal reflector. The characters move from one side to the other, casting their long monstrous shadows on the space. And he also shows, on the other side, those struggling against these shadows.

The Right to the City

Returning to the beginning, in other pages Borges recalled that “the brightest exploits lose their luster if they are not coined in words... [because] words are symbols of a shared memory.” When María Fernanda Ampuero traveled to Manabí, she found that

the recipient of her childhood memories was now a broken vessel, and only the testimony of those who had lost everything could restore the form of that vessel, which contains memory. Portoviejo breathes again in the voices of its survivors, and that respiration is both a feat of resurgence and a material and symbolic re-creation of the city. In the same way, the havoc wreaked by climate change in Havana, as narrated by Carlos Manuel Álvarez, helps us to understand the fragile social fabric and the precarious living conditions of its inhabitants. Their dilemma is not whether or not to flee the climate, but rather how to confront it, along with the frustrating lack of opportunities and the everyday living conditions in the city.

In the last chapter of *Invisible Cities*, the narrator describes how Kublai Khan's atlas contains maps of lands visited in the imagination, but not discovered or founded. The Tartar emperor complains that the last city, the city of the future, can only be a hell that will confine its inhabitants in concentric circles. Marco Polo, who is after all both traveler and chronicler, reminds the great Khan that hell is not a place in the future, but in the present, and that the best way of escaping from it is to acknowledge everything that is *not* hell, in order to give it space and make it last.

In line with Calvino, the geographer David Harvey also reminds us that the city has never been a harmonious place, free of conflicts, confusion, or violence: "Chaotic forms of urbanization throughout the world have made it hard to reflect on the nature of this task. We have been made and re-made without knowing exactly why, how, wherefore and to what end. How then, can we better exercise this right to the city?"

To close this introduction with a question that suggests so many others may seem a provocation. But the truth is that many Latin American cities today face the challenge of guaranteeing the right to their city to many citizens. In this case, the aim of the question is to remind us that it is not possible to earn this right without first reflecting on the very city we inhabit and which inhabits us: a reflection that requires making it visible and inviting others to get to know it. This has been precisely the shared mission of the traveling chroniclers of this book.

IMAGINING CITIES

Claudi Carreras, *Photo Editor*

IN THESE PAGES, writers, journalists, and photographers—chroniclers and historians of the everyday—have constructed their narratives with textual and visual tools: creating imaginaries born of the contemporary circumstances of Latin American cities. Direct perspectives that takes us out of our own realities to immerse us in others.

A marriage that has lasted (and that still remains solid), text and image continue to work together, linked inseparably in a manner normally governed by an unmovable hierarchy, in which photography is used to illustrate a text, that is, as a sort of mechanism of verification.

In *Visible Cities* we have incorporated the journalistic account and the visual dossier into a single narrative hierarchy, without subordinating one to the other, thereby obtaining independent and yet complementary dynamics. Here, word and image are able to diversify the meanings of the journalistic approach, proposing and generating new perspectives, new imaginaries.

The authors included in this project have not worked together, nor have they gone to the same places or explored identical themes. The narratives were written at the invitation of the organizers, while the photographers were asked to submit photo essays that they had already produced. The series of photographs were selected and edited for the present volume on the basis of their thematic resemblances with the subject-matter of the project and their capacity to evoke and recreate certain realities in a visual narrative that speaks of: inclusion, gender, the environment, equity, and resilience, the concepts that also guide the discourse of Habitat III, which was the catalyst of this publishing project.

The editing of the photographs presented here has also been done with a view to showing different mechanisms of visual narrative. The photographs reflect the different styles of their authors, that is, the different ways of telling a story through images.

Our highly visual age has brought with it a process of massification and saturation: an iconic voracity. It is increasingly difficult to retain images, to stop and reflect with and through photography. Well aware of this, we have sought to combine twenty-one different essays in the construction of the visibility of the Latin American city that will prove to be more than the sum of their parts. Eleven of these essays are visual, including one in the language of infographics, while the remaining ten are coded in the language of the written word.

The challenge of questioning stereotypes and explaining alien realities is by no means simple for photographers of Latin America. The paradigms imposed on the region and the subject-matter most often dealt with by the media, both at home and internationally, always seem to revolve around the same circumstances. The result is the generation of fragmented imaginaries that continue to perpetuate clichés.

That is why contemporary visual narratives must be increasingly sophisticated, constructed on different levels of abstraction, and able to include multiple layers of information in a single image.

The photographers whose work appears in *Visible Cities* have worked for years on the subjects they portray here. They seek rather to provoke questions in the viewer about the themes dealt with than to provide easy answers. And each one of them has achieved this through his or her own mechanisms of creation, opening up new and more effective channels of communication with the reader.

Claudia Jaguaribe carried out her project in two of Brazil's principal cities: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. With a highly creative approach, Jaguaribe has digitally re-constructed impossible perspectives of the two great cities, multiplying in the viewer the exponential growth of these megalopolises. Using countless aerial views, she explores a widespread and very real issue about the big cities of Latin America: how to fit so many people of different origins and such varied circumstances into a single unit that can still be called a city?

Maya Goded presents a series of images drawn from several projects she has been working on since she began taking photographs. Under the title *The Last Cinderella*, the Mexican photographer leads us on a tour of the iconic and representative aspects of femininity in her country. It is the result of several years' work. Myths and expectations are confounded in these images that portray the daily experience of a gender stereotype in a big Latin American city.

One of Latin America's most experienced photojournalists, Argentinian Rodrigo Abd lives in Peru, where he has produced this series about the establishment of illegal settlements in Madre de Dios. Illegal settlements of this kind can be found in many Latin American countries. People leave the big cities in search of a better future and try to make a home for themselves wherever they can, even if it means occupying an abandoned mine.

From his native Venezuela, Óscar Castillo portrays—with sharp contrasts—the social tensions that have beset his country in recent years. The poorer neighborhoods, the center, the entire city is affected by the uncertainty that has set the country adrift on a sea of disappointed expectations. There are no certainties either in Castillo's work, except that things cannot possibly continue as they are.

Cristina de Middel, a Spanish photographer who has settled in Rio de Janeiro, approaches gender issues by telling the other side of the story. De Middel put classified ads in the local press to find clients of prostitutes who would be willing to pose for her, in return for payment. She portrays these habitual consumers of female prostitution in the atmosphere of the cheap motels where they also have their furtive encounters.

Although most of these visual narratives are photographic, the Spaniard Jaime

Serra has used infographics to create the private map of a citizen in his own city, based on the places he normally frequents. A large city is a construction impossible to embrace as a whole: not even its own residents are able to take its full measure.

In his project *Adrift in Blue*, the Argentine photographer Nicolás Janowski, possibly the most experienced practitioner in this entire collection, explores the living conditions of the inhabitants of the southern seas. In Ushuaia, Janowski portrays sensations and moods that examine and question life at the limits, under extreme weather conditions. His evocative photographs recount a narrative which, while clearly contemporary, is also timeless.

In a completely different tone, Isadora Romero and Misha Vallejo, Ecuadorian photographers living in Quito, have captured with a Polaroid the moments following the tragic earthquake that struck the coast of Ecuador in April 2016. More than six hundred people died and thousands of homes and personal belongings were destroyed in a matter of just forty-five seconds. In this series entitled *De puño y letra* (Handwritten), the authors actually write their impressions following the earthquake directly onto the images.

The work of Adriana Zehbrauskas, a Brazilian photographer living in Mexico City, deals with the forty-three students from a teachers' college in Ayotzinapa who went missing in 2014. The images selected for this book belong to three projects made with an iPhone. The first of these projects captures scenes of the daily lives of the families of the students who disappeared, in an attempt to recover a semblance of everyday existence. Seeing that many of the families had no portraits of the young people who had gone missing, Zehbrauskas took up the genre herself, photographing the survivors. Finally, in a language conceived for Instagram and social media, she made detailed color photographs of the villages in the region. The sum of the three projects immerses us in the world of the "Ayotzinapa 43."

The contribution of the Colombian photographer Federico Ríos is focused on the Comuna 13 zone in Medellín, the city where he lives. Ríos has been working on the project for more than five years. The thin line between harmonious coexistence in the *comunas* of Medellín and the pressure exerted by the forces of order is the subject of these images. Though they deal specifically with the circumstances of a changing Medellín, they illuminate issues on the peripheries of many Latin American cities.

Finally, Darío Cortés photographs contemporary Cuba and the changes the country is currently undergoing. Certain that things will not continue to be as they have been, and aware of all the uncertainties weighing over the island's future, the photographer captures everyday scenes in today's Havana, a city which, like the rest of the country, is experiencing a process of deep transformation that is slowly reflected in its streets and its people.

All of these visual projects dialogue with the journalistic texts in a shared dimension, though they tell their own independent stories. Here the image does not simply illustrate the text, but speaks rather with its own authorial voice, rendering visible other angles of the Latin American city.

MARCELA RIBADENEIRA

How to Stop Being Invisible in Full View

“ Avenida La Gasca is a steep tongue of asphalt that seems to end at the Rucu Pichincha, that sharp chunk of volcano flanking Quito on its western edge.”

THE MAN IS WEARING A MILITARY UNIFORM. He's standing on the sidewalk of Avenida 6 de Diciembre, a few meters from the Ecuadorian Army Communications and Electronic Warfare Group headquarters. A wall of cinderblocks painted white surrounds the complex. In the palimpsest of graffiti that has accumulated over the blocks one can see a penis and various swastikas. When he sees a yellow taxicab approaching, the man extends his arm with the thumb raised. The clouds cover the mountains on the city's northeast side, but the midday sun falls perpendicular across his camouflage cap. Eager to escape its rays, the man quickens his pace, entering the vehicle through the passenger door when it stops at the curb.

"What a shame!" he exclaims when he catches a glimpse of the long hair and tailored blazer of the woman behind the wheel. "Well, now that I made you stop, I guess I'll have to go... Take me to Prensa, please."

"Why do say you '*have to*'?" she asks, knowing perfectly well the reason.

"You see... I never get into a car that's being driven by a woman," the man says, mopping the perspiration from his forehead with his uniform sleeve. "I don't trust women drivers."

The cabbie had heard many of her passengers offer similar judgements. She no longer even took it badly, since she knows there are also people who *prefer* their driver to be a woman. If she lost a fare one day on account of her gender, on the same day she'd likely gain a different one for the same reason. The ones who are positive about having a female cabbie often say things like: "Let's go with the *señora*; she represents all of us behind the wheel" or "Like this, among just women, we feel much safer."

"Did your wife do something to make you mistrust women?" she asks as she pulls the cab into the street.

"No, no, no! It's just that they don't drive well," he responds, as if revealing an obvious and universal truth.

Quito is located high up in the Andes, two thousand eight hundred meters

above sea level. Its houses and streets creep along the sides of the scoop in the high plain that contains it. In this strip of urban congestion—approximately fifty km long by eight km wide—close to two and a half million inhabitants coexist with nearly half a million vehicles.

Martha Calahorrano is the woman who drove the soldier who doesn't like how women drive. For the past three years she has been driving one of the nearly fifteen thousand taxis that operate legally in the city, according to the metropolitan transit agency. The company she belongs to has eighty shareholder-members. Three, including Martha, are women. They all prefer to work at night. Martha does so from 7 pm to midnight, and she prefers to work in the northern part of the city. Now she is heading to one of the hotter parts of town to pick up passengers. Before stepping on the accelerator with the point of her ballerina-style slipper she checks the rearview mirror and glances at both side mirrors.

Backing up, she moves her Chevrolet Aveo out of the parking area of the Centro Comercial Aeropuerto. She gives a few coins to the guard, who thanks her by saying "*Gracias, niña.*" Martha is fifty-six years old and a grandmother. She wears white stretch pants and a lightweight cloth blouse. She is used to the guards, metropolitan police, her passengers, and even other taxi drivers calling her "*princesa,*" "my queen," "*mamita,*" and "my daughter." They also say "*señora,*" but those who use that term are usually younger men and women. "Heading back, central," she murmurs into her Motorola radio.

The Centro Comercial Aeropuerto is crowned by a red neon sign proclaiming "Supermaxi," and is located across from the old Quito airport, to which there arrive—every half hour, until midnight—shuttle buses full of passengers coming from the new airport of Tababela, thirty minutes by highway outside the city. Martha's is not the only taxi waiting outside the parking area: there are three other vehicles ahead of hers.

The drivers have left their seats and are leaning against the roofs of their cars, trying to see if another passenger transport van is on the way. They all want to pack their taxis with families coming back from Miami, their arms full of duty-free packages. Those are the ones who are probably going to go to the González Suárez, to the Quito Tennis club, to Bellavista, or to some other well-lighted neighborhood with intelligent architecture, tree-lined streets, and manicured lawns where the local dogs languidly answer the call of nature. The taxi drivers also pullulate expectantly around the foreign tourists, who usually arrive in short-sleeved shirts and sandals, looking to go to the hotels

in the historic city center: a ride that amounts to five dollars on the taxi meter.

While Martha scouts for possible passengers, two bursts of fireworks—one green, another white—explode in the sky. This is nothing unusual in Quito: a local team wins a soccer match, explosions; a holiday for some public institution or political party, explosions; any number of different civic or commercial fairs, explosions. A woman with short hair and a scarf comes up to her cab. She only has a handbag and looks tired.

When she gets into the passenger compartment there is a muffled jingle from the coins she has in her hand.

“To the San Felipe developments please.”

Sometimes the air gets thick in the taxi and only allows an exchange of basic information. This is one of those times, at least until just a few blocks before her destination, when the woman raises her head up from the back of her seat and breaks the silence.

“You work at night?”

“Yes.”

“Until what time?”

“Until midnight.”

“Hmm... it seems more dangerous to work at night.”

The woman slides the hollow of her neck down onto her seatback and only sits up again when the taxi has stopped in front of the brightly lit brick residential development.

“Here you are, ma’am,” Martha says, recommending that she open the door carefully.

Ever since the Taxi Service Regularization program began in 2011, women taxi drivers are no longer seen as anecdotal and have become a visible minority. But their presence still comes as a surprise to many passengers.

Municipal ordinance no. 0047, emitted during this process, requires that the taxi companies created during the regularization period include a minimum of 5% women as drivers and partners or stockholders. The cab companies that existed previously didn’t have to fulfill such a requirement in order to receive permission to operate their businesses.

Back from the airport, Martha checks her cell phone. She has a screensaver photo of her four-month-old granddaughter. In the mornings she takes care of her mother, who is a hundred and two years of age, and cooks for her two youngest sons—one who is eighteen, the other twenty (she also has two others, both of whom are married and living elsewhere). This has been

her routine since she separated from her husband, three years ago. She explains that, despite the psychological, physical, and verbal mistreatment she received from her husband, it still took her a long time to arrive at the decision to seek a separation. As a matter of fact, the taxi she drives was purchased with a loan that she had arranged for her husband to be able to buy his own business. But he never ended up using it.

Outside, the cold has arrived, and so have a bunch of new transport buses from Tababela. Martha sticks her head out the window: “Pssst... Taxi?” She is in an area she doesn’t consider dangerous. No need to lock the car doors or keep the windows rolled up.

A young family—father, mother, and a girl with red boots—gets into her cab. “To Gaspar de Villarroel,” says the father with a Venezuelan accent.

The road was thinly traveled and Martha was enjoying the ride. No traffic jams, no horns honking like flocks of mechanical geese. Cold weather empties out the public spaces. The fact that Quito’s nightspots close earlier also contributes to the slower nocturnal pace.

The church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción—whose metallic roof looks like a Mexican sombrero—and a Domino’s Pizza shop share the corner where the road begins heading sharply upwards to Gaspar de Villarroel. The few older houses still standing are elbowing for space with buildings whose ground floors serve as bakeries, doctors’ offices, and shops.

“Leave us off where the sign is, on the right,” the man says.

The taxi pulls up next to a ‘no parking’ sign and the family gets out.

Martha does not go back again to the old airport. She decides to try her luck at the Estación Norte ‘Río Coca’ bus station, the northern terminal for the accordion-like *Ecovía* buses that ply the city’s longitudinal route between 6 am and 10 pm. Martha parks behind two ‘colored’ taxis, as they call the ones that operate illegally. It’s a technique she has learned to employ to her advantage; people coming out of the station often prefer to take the legitimate cab, even if it’s not the first one in line. A few seconds later, a corpulent, bearded man in blue overalls stops outside the passenger door. He opens it and manages to get in. By the time he has finished adjusting his girth into the seat, the inside the cab has taken on an intoxicating air of alcohol.

“To Gaviria,” he says effusively.

Martha hesitates. Usually she doesn’t take drunks, but this guy was faster than she could sniff. Finally she pulls gets her cab underway, more a matter of inertia than decisiveness.

“But I’m not going to pay you the three dollars!”

“Sir, I charge only what the taximeter indicates.”

“I’m not going to pay three dollars,” he repeats “I pay two... I’m a fan of El Nacional.”

El Nacional is a soccer team in Quito that hasn’t won a local match in ten years. Martha isn’t a fan of any of the teams.

The Gaviria neighborhood isn’t far away, but it takes a while to get there. The taxis that Martha’s company employs are ‘executive’ class, which means they don’t pick up passengers hailing cabs on the streets but only through a telephone operator; therefore they haven’t been equipped with the video cameras and emergency buttons that are part of the basic security kit the National Transit Authority has installed in the rest of country’s conventional taxis. But she does have a radio, and Martha knows that if she has a suspicious passenger on board, all she has to do is say “10-6-1, *central*” and the company will immediately put into action its security operation. This man, however, after babbling something that sounds a bit like “I come from a little rock-n-roll and respect,” essentially shuts up and looks out the window, watching ro-tisserie chickens turning slowly in the windows at 6 de Diciembre and Gaviria.

“Jesus! We’re here—this is it!”

Martha stops the cab alongside a dark sidewalk.

“Charge me, my beautiful queen,” the man says, passing her a five dollar bill. “It was three bucks, no?”

Martha hands back the change.

“My name’s Mario,” he tells her when he finally manages to pull the handle in the correct direction and opens the door, “what’s yours?”

Once the respective worlds of the drunk and the driver have been separated by the taxi’s metal door, Martha lets out a laugh. The tension accumulated during the ride finds release. It’s not the first time a passenger—drunk or sober—has flirted with her, and it always make her nervous. If they ask for her telephone number she gives them a false one. She likes conversing with the passengers and she likes her job, but she is very clear about why she is doing it. After paying off her loans from the purchase of the taxi and her house in the Marianitas neighborhood—in the extreme northern sector of the city—her plan is to take her younger kids on a vacation to Colombia or Cuba. “If I were working eight hours a day in a factory, my family would be all alone,” she says. “I wouldn’t have any time for them.”

According to the 2012 Survey on Time Use—carried out by the National

Institute of Statistics and Census together with the Commission on Transition toward the Council on Women and Gender Equality—Ecuadorian women dedicate 46% of their time to work, whether remunerated or not, and 54% of their time to personal activities. On the other hand, men dedicate 40% to the former and 60% to the latter. Driving her own taxi not only gives Martha more control over her time, it also enables her to have a relatively stable financial situation. “This is a respectable kind of work, and it’s economically viable,” she says “Where else could I make a thousand U.S. dollars every month?”

But driving her own cab doesn’t simply signify greater freedom of time use and sufficient income: it also means being immersed in the public space, which is principally occupied by men, according to Susana Wappenstein, professor and researcher in the Sociology and Gender Studies department of Ecuadoran campus of the Latin American School for Social Sciences [FLACSO Ecuador]. Driving a taxi means being in that public space, but at the same time being isolated. And if one happens to be subjected to verbal aggression or some type of abuse by one’s passenger, it also means essentially being trapped inside a metal box with few options for being able to react—to defend oneself, request assistance or escape.

Sandra Cadena is not part of any taxi company. That is, she doesn’t work legally. If some city cop stops her, she says that the passengers she has on board are friends or members of her family. “As long as they don’t see that I have a Motorola radio, they don’t suspect anything.” She drives a gold Hyundai Getz and most of her customers are women. For the past two months her husband has been helping her with some of the driving: after twenty-one years of working for the same company, he was suddenly left without a job.

Four years ago, Sandra was working for a legitimate taxi company and found herself very near the address from which a customer had requested taxi service. She grabbed her radio mike and let the operator know she would take the call. A man, about forty years old, wearing jeans, tee shirt, and coat, got in and sat in the front passenger seat. Although Sandra had already had him once before as a passenger, it nevertheless seemed strange to her that he chose to sit in the front seat, next to her. She knew he was an architect, and that he had two daughters. The architect asked her to drive him to Tambillo, a rural parish outside the territory that Sandra normally covered. The conversation began with pleasantries and small talk about the weather, children, and traffic. Later, the architect felt emboldened enough to begin a monologue about the lack of expertise in bed and the age of his wife, about his sexual preferences—

he liked masturbation and oral sex prior to penetration—and about how he was the kind of man who didn't beat around the bush, who suggested right away to the girls he liked that they should go to a motel together. Before he put his hand on Sandra's, which was on the shift stick, he added that his wife didn't understand him, that she was frigid and he was passionate.

"I want to get to know you better," the architect told her. "As I mentioned, I'm not talking about inviting you for coffee. I told you: I get right to the point."

Sandra didn't know what to say. Her first impulse was to stop the car. When she composed herself enough to speak, she let him know that she was going to let him out right then and there, in the middle of the road. She was nervous.

"Get out right this instant," she said, unlocking the doors and trying to sound firm.

"ок, ок... I see that you're not easy," the man responded, but without making any move to get out of his seat.

After telling him to behave himself and admonishing him not to say another word, Sandra continued on to Tambillo. But when the man got out of the cab she was still struggling to control herself, to the point that she forgot to tell him how much he owed her for the ride. The architect didn't ask her about it, either, and he went off without paying.

Sandra recalls this episode while driving along the General Rumiñahui highway. If the roadways of the Quito metropolitan area can be thought of as a circulatory system, then this highway should be considered a tourniquet. People from Conocoto and Valle de Los Chillos, on their way to work in the city, turn into coagulates here, slowly plodding forward in their cars and buses. Sandra sees the fact that the vehicles in front of her are at a dead stop as an opportunity to take her white Samsung off her lap and review her Instagram account. She "likes" a video showing how to paint phosphorescent green fingernail designs.

Sandra has 1980s-style bangs, her hair pulled back and tied with a purple bow. She isn't using makeup. This morning she got up at four-thirty and didn't have time to "put herself together." She'll do it while waiting for passengers. But her long fingernails are covered in a thick coat of red lacquer on which are painted various white dots, the overall effect being that of making the steering wheel look like it is being handled by a swarm of beetles. "They're natural," she declares proudly. "Except this one here that broke on me is acrylic."

There's no escaping this highway to get to her destination. She has to drop off Bachita, a woman of seventy-eight years, at an osteoporosis clinic on Ave-

nida Eloy Alfaro, in the center-northern part of the city. At rush hour, this trajectory can take a little more than an hour. But it's still early—only a quarter past six—and the knot that had formed at the onramp to the highway is loosening. Sandra steps on the gas. Only half an hour later, she leaves Bachita off at the entrance to the clinic and receives twelve dollars and a farewell blessing from her customer. "I'm like a daughter to her," Sandra explains "she's my regular customer." Then she is off again right away to pick up her next passenger in the neighborhood known as La Gasca.

Sandra worked part-time at the taxi company of which the architect who doesn't beat around the bush was a client. In the afternoons she did the rounds picking up schoolchildren. Her plan was to save enough to buy a van and dedicate herself exclusively to the school pickups. To finance the project, she and her husband had sold the Kia Carens that Sandra was driving. But then the cancer intervened. "They did a radical mastectomy," she reveals "and they found it had metastasized; it was aggressive." She was 37 years old. "The money we got from the sale of the car we had to spend on my treatment," she says. After finishing radiation therapy Sandra went back to work at the taxi company, first as a telephone operator—she still had to stay out of the sun—then, later, as a driver, too.

Avenida La Gasca is a steep tongue of asphalt that seems to end at the Rucu Pichincha, that sharp chunk of volcano flanking Quito on its western edge. In 1975 an avalanche slid down this route, terrorizing the inhabitants of the small, tile-roofed houses that proliferate along its cross streets and which, in recent years, have increasingly been demolished to make room for low, box-type buildings.

La Gasca seems to have a speed bump on almost every block. The Hyundai Getz stops at a red light and a gray-haired man with bronzed creases on his forehead and neck shows Sandra the selection of pirated CDs and DVDs he has to offer. The only promotional jacket cover that can be made out clearly is for the film *Ice Age: Collision Course*, which is only days away from its premier in Ecuador. She moves the index finger of her right hand from one side to the other as a negative response; she has all the music she needs on a USB memory stick connected to the radio on her dashboard (she's listening to *cumbia gaucha* music now). Accepting the services of the windshield washing kids who abound on the city's streets seems not to interest her either; she has her own flannel cloth in the glove compartment, together with some "Body Splash" from Victoria's Secret.

While the tires of her car look for the best angles for slaloming through the speed bumps, Sandra tells us that she left the company, not because of the episode with the architect but rather to have more free time. She couldn't spend much time with her family, she says. On occasion she would have to do shifts from 5:00 am to 8:00 pm on the weekends, and they only gave her half an hour for lunch. She wanted to have more time. After quitting, she sent messages by WhatsApp to the passengers she knew from working for the company, letting them know she was available as an independent driver and ready to serve them. Now they call her on her cell phone to coordinate their transportation needs directly.

She has various frequent customers, like Bachita and Dayana (a veterinary physiotherapist who is about to retire to one of the cross street along La Gasca), who choose her service because they feel safer with her than they do when taking a taxi randomly on the street or a city bus. According to metropolitan district statistics, 67% of the women passengers have been subjected to verbal sexual aggressions in the city's public transportation vehicles, and 65% have reported some type of violence or sexual harassment in the same context. Sandra also feels safer working this way. "I don't pick up people I don't know," she says. Also, she avoids working in areas—both on the north and south side—that she considers dangerous.

Nighttime, too, requires its special cautionary measures.

"At night I don't take anyone," says Gina "Even if they were dying, I would just let them finish up and die."

Gina Chicaiza is 42 years old. She uses dark glasses, steering the wheel with her right arm; the left one is packed into a blue-and-white sleeve, and is hanging out the window of her Aveo Emotion. Although her sun protector sleeve is emblazoned with a logo for Emelec, a soccer team from Guayaquil, Gina is a fan of El Nacional. A brown bear with a vanilla scent bobs and dangles from her rearview mirror; from the front passenger seat Aylin Solange, a seven month old baby is playing with it. The baby is sitting on the lap of Paola, her mother, who also happens to be Gina's 18-year-old daughter.

Gina explains that she'd rather get home safely than pick up potentially dangerous passengers in the late hours of the night, her vehicle negotiating the cobblestone streets of San Isidro del Inca. On the sidewalks there are more electricity poles and cables than there are trees, and the walls are covered with graffiti. Traditional food stands—full of people eating *menestras*, *chugchucaras*, and meat—bazaars, and auto tire shops are mixed together with

the area's simple houses. Gina has driven and owned her own taxi for nearly ten years, and is a stockholder in the Monteserrín cab company, in northern Quito. In fact, she was the first woman ever to become a stockholder in the company. Now there are five.

Women who drive executive taxis in Quito, like Gina, have increased by 30% over the past three years, according to estimates from Alex Morales, president of the Provincial Union of Executive Taxis of Pichincha. The directors of both the Union of Taxi Transport Cooperatives of Pichincha and of the Union of Taxi Operators of Pichincha also report considerable increases of women owners and drivers in their respective groups, although they don't offer any concrete statistics.

Gina heads to Parrilladas Don Pato for lunch with a couple of her colleagues. One is seated in the back of her taxi. She has a piercing above the left corner of her mouth and fuchsia lipstick. Her name is Paola Báez, and she is twenty-five years old. For the past two months she has been driving one of the company taxis, though she is not its owner—prior to that, she had been a truck driver. The other, who is already waiting for them outside, is Paola Llumipanta, a 32-year-old owner-driver who spent nearly a decade as a migrant in Spain. Gina calls her *cuñada* [sister-in-law], even though Paola isn't really married to her brother and despite the fact that the relationship is currently on standby. Nor is Gina married to the man with whom she has been living for the past twenty years—and with whom she has two children—though she nevertheless refers to him as “my husband.”

The walls of Parrilladas Don Pato are sky blue and its seats are lemon green. A piece of *bachata* music is blaring at top volume. The women sit down at a table and order. Gina's daughter and her baby take a little longer in getting themselves seated. Paola Llumipanta explains that she learned to drive in Spain. She returned to Ecuador two years ago, but she still hasn't gotten used to the way people in Quito drive.

“Like when some guy rolls down his window and yells ‘Idiot!’ or ‘I knew it had to be a woman driver!’ it's really hard,” she says. “Those kinds of comments are really hurtful.”

Those insults, explains Susana Wappenstein, are the equivalent of the sexual comments directed at women concerning their appearance when they walk down the street. “It's the same thing,” she says. “It's based on the principle that someone feels they have the right to insult women for their condition of being a woman.”

Gina doesn't let herself get bent out of shape by such comments: she believes in retaliation. After ordering grilled meat with fried potatoes and a salad—she's trying to lose weight, so she doesn't get the rice—she mentions what a male taxi driver told her when they were both stopped at a red light on Avenida Amazonas.

"Jeez! Nowadays everybody's leaving the kitchen to come out here and drive," he spat through the open window.

"Go tell your whore of a wife to cook for you. I'm *done* with that crap!" she shot back.

Both Paolas—the one with the piercing and the one who misses Spain—erupt in raucous laughter. Gina's daughter smiles silently and blushes. Her mother wants her to get her professional license too, so she can help drive the taxi. Of course she wants her to study, too. But she wants her to have a source of income so she can support Aylin Solange, since the baby's father is not in the picture.

The orders of grilled meat arrive with a jug of berry juice and five glasses. *Piercing* Paola presses a sausage with her fork, provoking fat drops of grease to sweat out of it. A little distracted, she tells her friends that the last few weeks haven't been particularly good. She doesn't think being a non-owner who drives is a good deal: every day that she works, regardless of how much or how little she makes, the owner takes twenty-five dollars from her for the cab rental; and then she has to pay for gasoline on top of that.

"I never wanted to drive a taxi," she explains before popping into her mouth the piece of sausage she'd been dangling from her fork. "I put an ad on OLX [a web site for classified advertisements] to look for a driving job. There are a lot of companies that need truck drivers. But there wasn't any response from them; the only calls I got back were from the taxi companies."

"It's tough out there," Gina agrees.

"I want a secure job, where I have a fixed salary," *Piercing* Paola says. "With taxi work, one day you do OK, the next day it goes bad, and the day after it's even worse. If I had a more stable job at least I'd be earning six hundred dollars a month. Making money on a daily basis, in a cash business, isn't the same. You end up spending whatever you make in a single day."

"It's true," says the Paola who misses Spain. "You want to set some aside to pay bills, but then you see something that you like or need, and, since you have a few bucks on you, you end up spending them."

Piercing Paola prefers driving trucks. She says that a while ago she left off

her résumé with a multinational company that was looking for truck drivers. At the security booth where she left off the application form, the guard confirmed that the company was looking for drivers, and that the main requirement was to have a professional Class “C” license. He added, however, that it was company policy not to hire women for that particular kind of work. *Piercing* Paola left off her résumé and a photocopy of her Class “C” license anyway.

“They wouldn’t hire me even if I had a higher class of license than what they’re asking for,” she says.

“It wouldn’t matter to them if you had an airplane pilot’s license,” adds Gina.

Luis, the man with whom *Piercing* Paola began a relationship three months ago, arrives when the only thing left on the plates are a few leaves of lettuce. A few minutes before, the women had been talking about some of their male colleagues at the taxi company. One of them had recently adopted the habit of sending air kisses to Gina (which she felt were innocent, as long as they didn’t lead to anything else). Another guy, commented *Piercing* Paola, had called her “my love.”

“Pair of ugly bastards,” Gina had said.

Piercing Paola had laughed, but she clarified that all of her male colleagues had been really friendly since she began working at the taxi company.

While Luis waits for his order of grilled meat to arrive, he recalls one of *Piercing* Paola’s stories. One day, at four in the afternoon, she was driving through the Gaspar de Villarroel neighborhood when four construction workers—visibly exhausted after a long day of hard work—got in her cab and asked her to take them to “La Comuna.” La Comuna Santa Clara de Millán is a settlement of indigenous descendants of the Quito-Cara, located on the slope of the Pichincha volcano. For over a century it has been a territory with its own judicial autonomy, which means it has its own government. Today, small pharmacies, bakeries, shoe stores, hardware stores, and homes dot its narrow streets. In 2014 the mayor of Quito, Mauricio Rodas, signed a municipal declaration giving continuity to a development plan that would guarantee the commune’s autonomy and recognize its culture. *Piercing* Paola had no idea how to get to the place. “Calm down, lady,” one of the workers told her, “I’ll tell you how to go.”

That’s when she smelled the alcohol on his breath and realized that all four of them were drunk. She doesn’t quite know why, but she started the car and pulled off anyway. She did take her cell phone and discretely sent a WhatsApp

message to Luis, however.

Paola: Hi my love. I'm on my way to La Comuna with four drunks. I didn't realize they were drunk... and I'm afraid.

Luis: Where are you? Send me the GPS coordinates!

"That's what those security codes on the Motorola radio are for!" Gina admonishes.

That's as far as the exchange of messages went. *Piercing* Paola heard one of the workers talking on his telephone, threatening someone who had robbed a friend's cell phone. With the same discretion that she had employed to send the message to Luis, she slid her cell phone under her thigh for fear they would rob it from her.

Luis rolls his eyes and tells how worried he was: "I was calling her constantly, and she wasn't answering!"

At the entrance to La Comuna, the drunks noticed she was having a hard time negotiating a particularly steep street, and they decided to have a little fun at her expense. They didn't mention that they had already arrived at their destination, but instead urged her to continue on upward. After they had their laugh, they told her to turn around and leave them off several blocks down the hill. "To help you get over your fear, my girl," was the response one of them gave when she asked why they'd made her ascend the steep hill unnecessarily.

The women keep silent for a few seconds and exchange glances between themselves. Finally, they explode in shrieking laughter. Luis tries to keep his composure, but ends up laughing right along with them. Gina orders another jug of berry juice while a twelve-year-old boy clears the table and serves Luis his plate of grilled meat. Gina's daughter takes Aylin Solange, who had been quiet all through their lunch, back to wait for them in the Aveo Emotion. She knows the anecdotes have scarcely begun—she's heard them all before, anyway. She knows that between the Paolas and her mother there are many stories that have to be told and retold. And she realizes that those stories really only begin to make sense for the drivers when they have a chance to get out of their cabs and share them among friends—among other women who have found in this kind of work a means for materializing their entrepreneurial spirit and their desire for freedom. And while they may seem be unusual means in the eyes of many, these women feel that they're becoming masters of their own time, and of a city that has long refused to include space for them in it.

CLAUDIA JAGUARIBE

About São Paulo and Entremorros















My work proposes a frontier between documentation and its interpretation. It emphasizes aspects and details that are effectively present but at times must be constructed to be seen as a whole. My interest is to create images that bring new meanings and visual relationships to the constant transformations we are witnessing in our environment. It focuses on how we perceive and create our relationship between nature, culture and its visual interpretation.

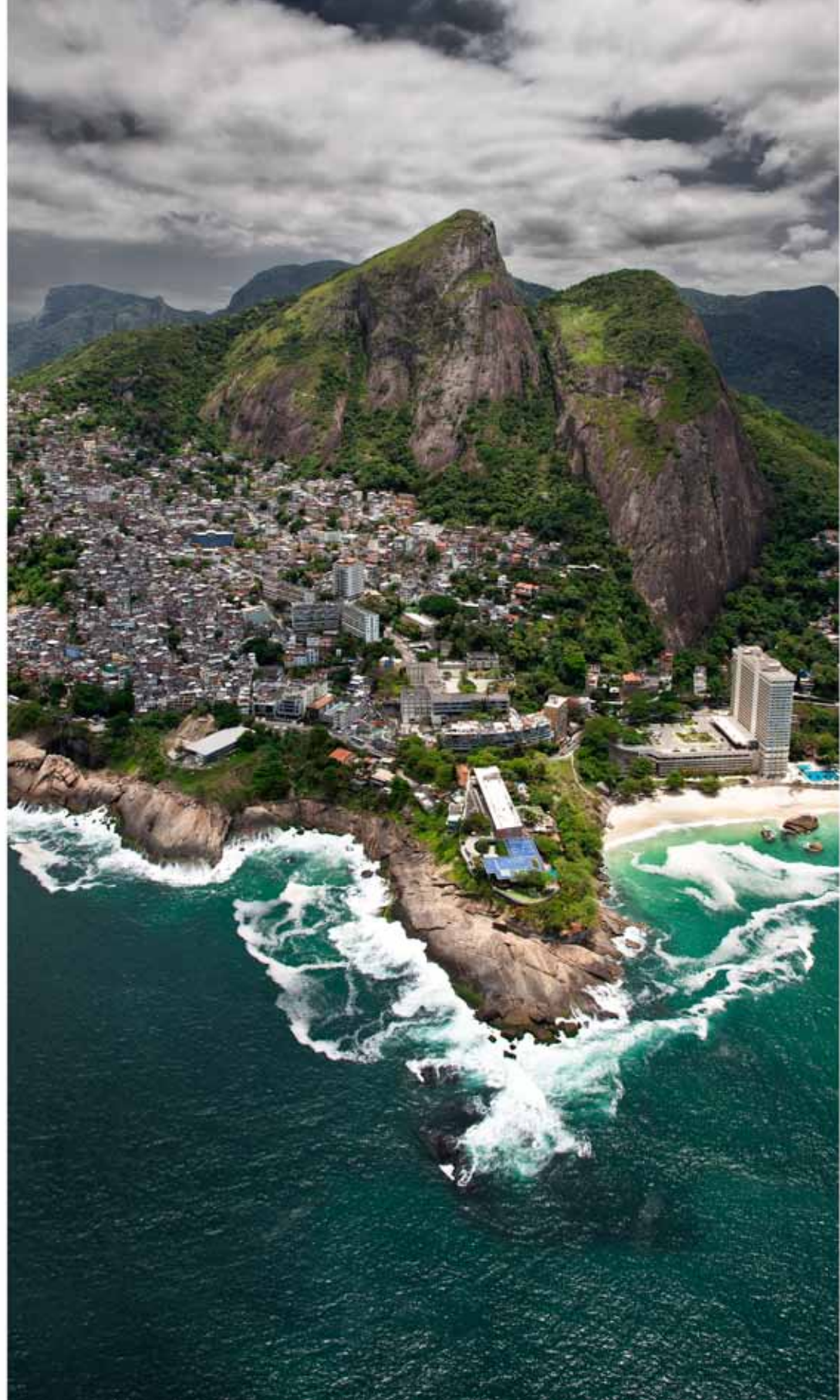
About São Paulo and Entremorros are both series that deal with the complexity of representing the spatial growth and physical dimension of each city. For each series I chose to work and develop a photographic perspective that would emphasize their characteristics.

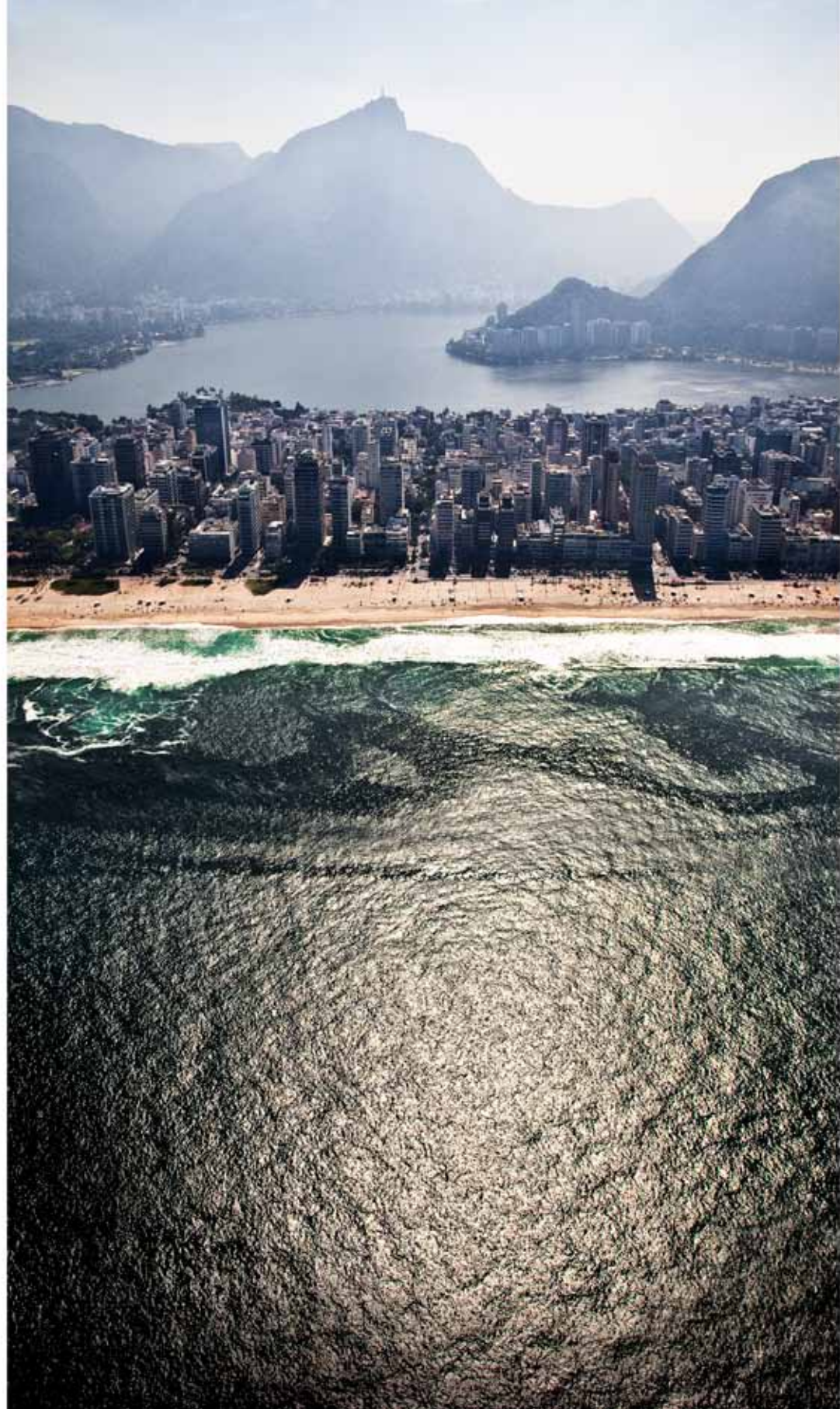
In About São Paulo I wanted to depict the immensity of the city, show how the constructed surface becomes a landscape in itself obliterating the original geography. This was done by photographing from an aerial perspective from a point of view which is frontal and distant. After several helicopter rides and going up to different rooftops in the city I went on to make a subjective mapping ,montages and combinations of the photographic material. Creating panoramic images we can look at the city as if a permanent frontal view were possible. The photos are mounted somewhat randomly, conveying to the viewer the feeling of being lost in a huge city dominated by buildings and few landmarks.

Entremorros

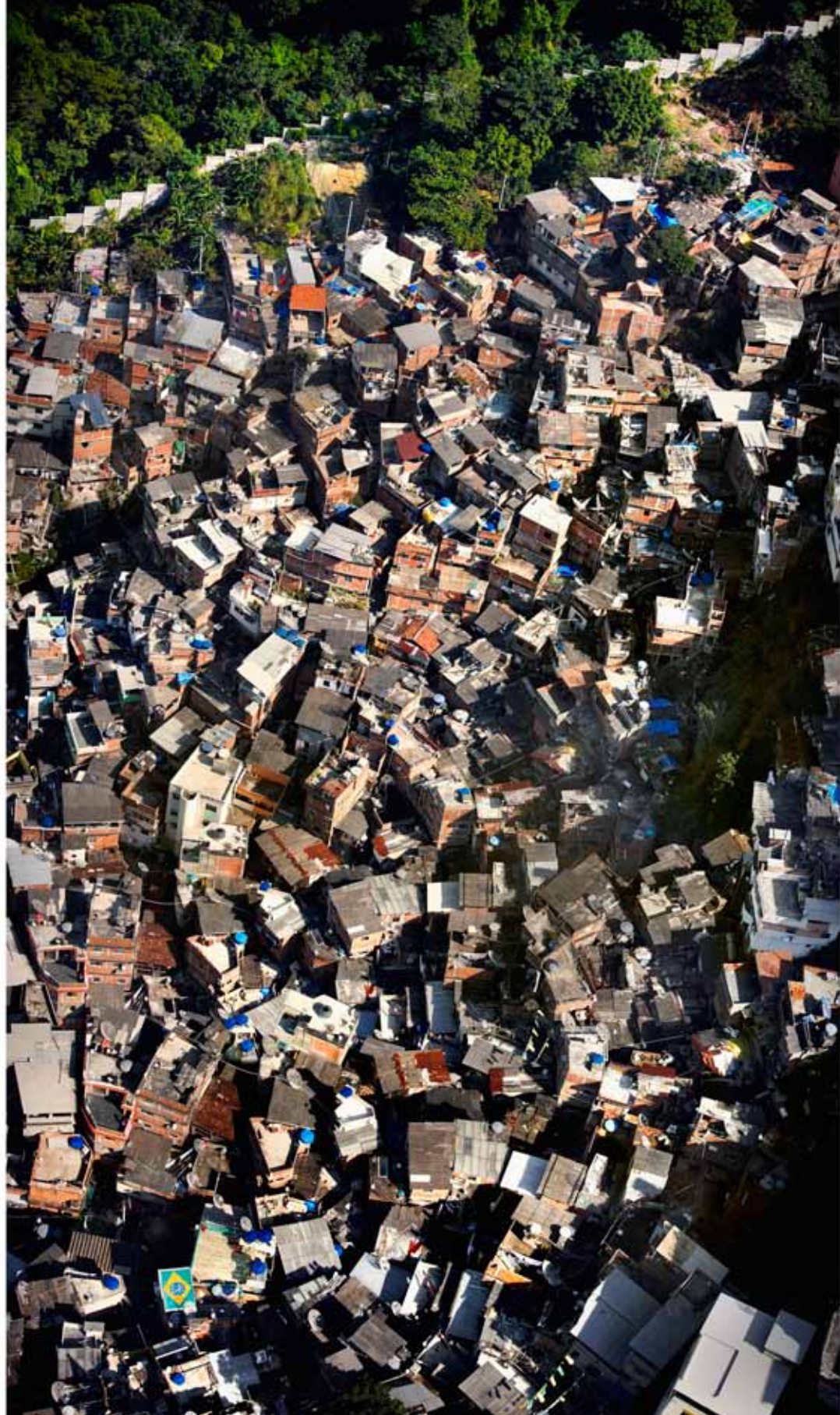
The city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, my native town, has a long tradition of being depicted by painters and photographers. I wanted to review it from a contemporary perspective, considering the huge transformations that have been occurring in the landscape as a result of the intense urban growth. I photographed the southern region of Rio that concentrates the richest and trendiest neighborhoods as well as some of the biggest favelas; Rocinha, Morro Santa Marta, Vidigal. Photographing from within the favelas and from a helicopter I could create images that show the massive changes brought by the chaotic city growth and its consequences in the landscape.

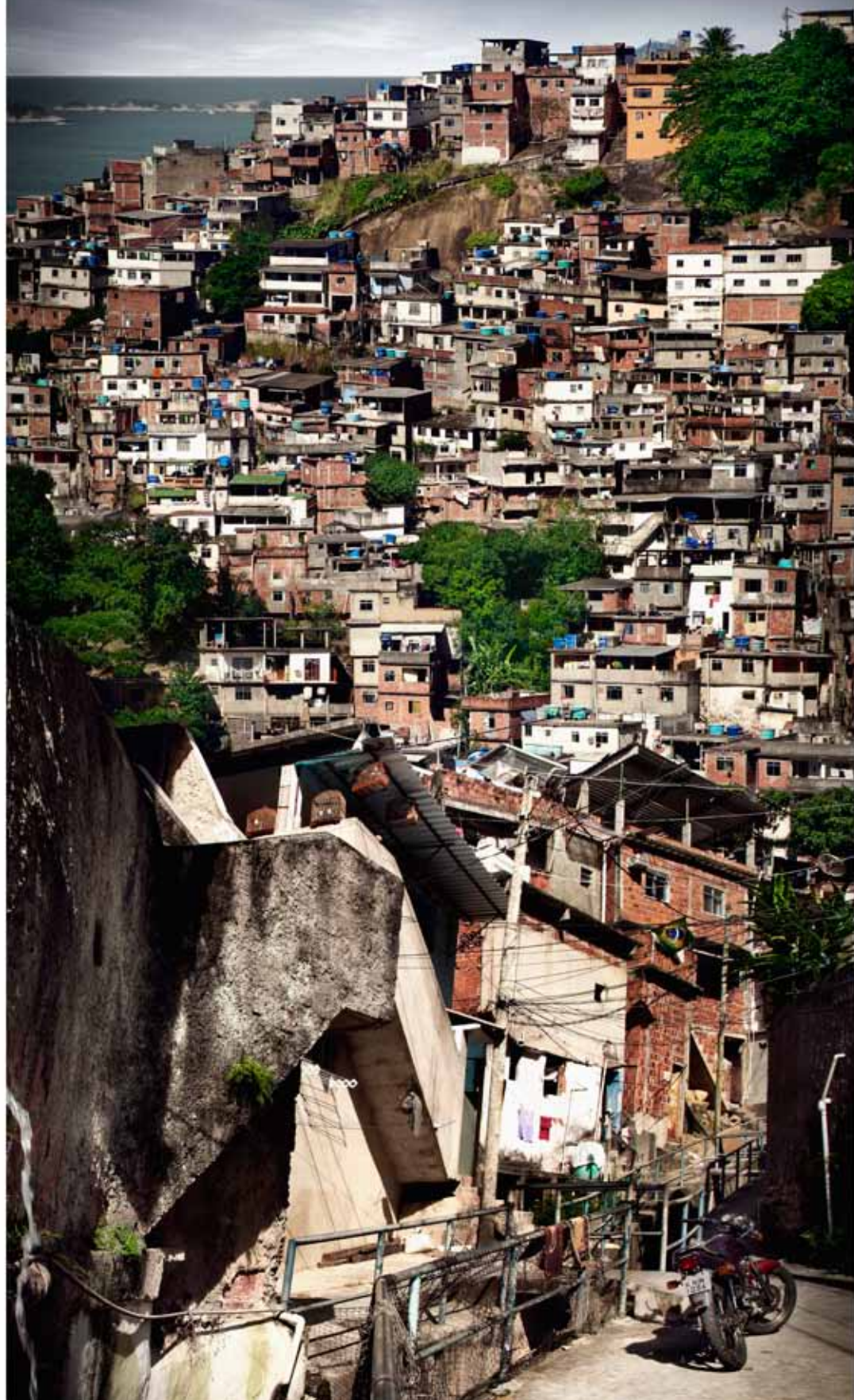
Rio is a city that grows between the mountains and the sea, creating a vertical cityscape. In order to show this prominent aspect I opted for a framing and angles that purposefully create a sense of unease and precariousness. On closer inspection, one realizes that the perspective in every composition is oddly skewed. Some images are collages of separate photographic takes in which the distant and the very near are next to one another.

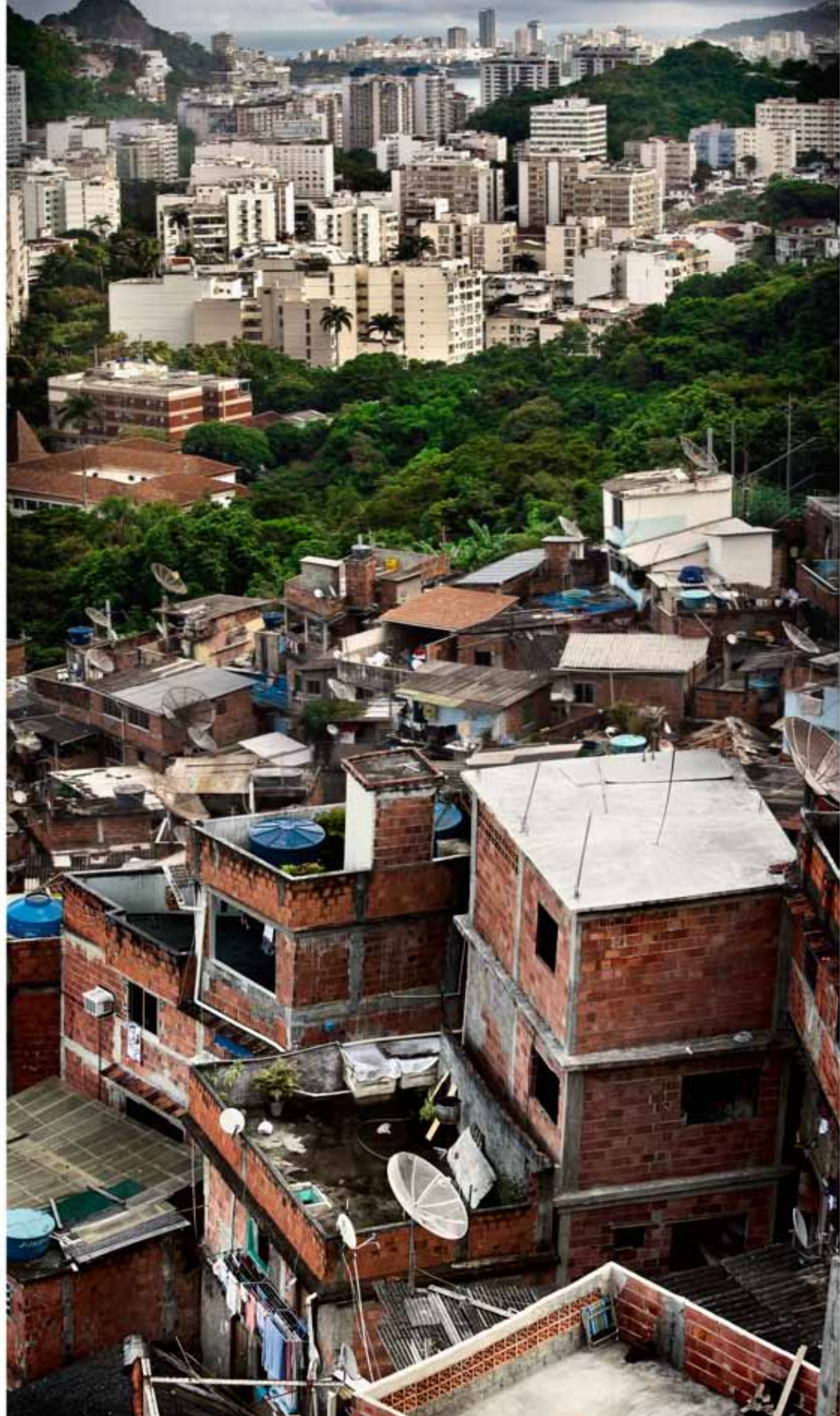


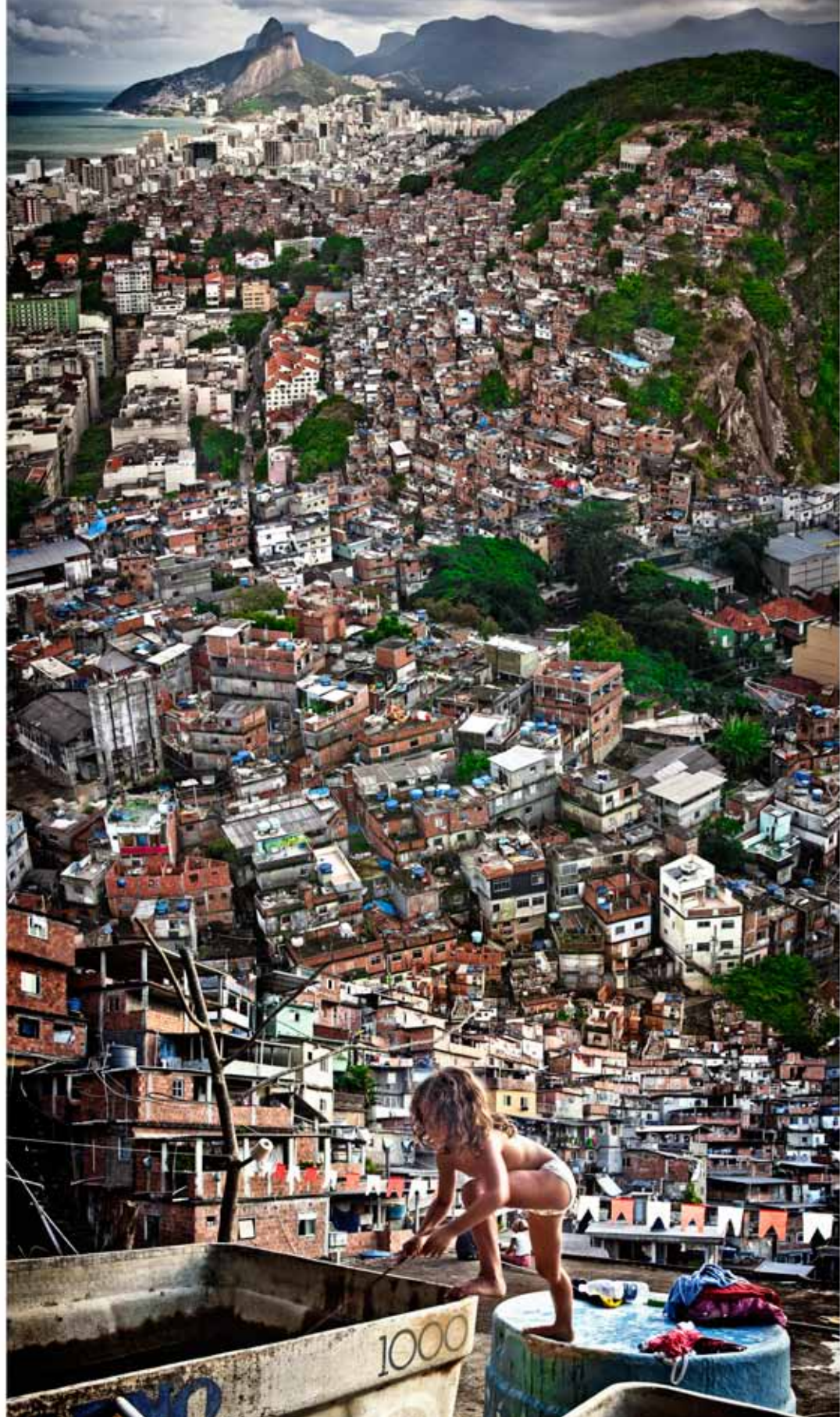












CARLOS MANUEL ÁLVAREZ

The Low Zone

“ In short, for forty years Cristina has witnessed and suffered through each and every coastal flood that has hit Havana.”

ONE

CEARLY EVERY YEAR Cristina Rodríguez López and her son Guillermo Solís move into the same house. They both live in a basement that has been turned into an apartment—extremely well cared for but, like all basements, confining and oppressive—in the building located at 458 Calle Quinta, between Avenida Paseo and Calle A, in Havana’s principal neighborhood, Vedado.

Like the rest of the neighbors who live in the lower depths, beneath street level and only a few hundred yards from the Malecón bordering the sea, Cristina, eighty-four years of age, and Guillermo, who recently turned forty-five, pay close attention to weather reports during television news programs. They have learned from bitter experience to correctly interpret even the most subtle, euphemistic comments employed by the meteorologists.

“When they announce ‘light coastal penetration,’” Guillermo says, “brace yourself! That means there’ll be plenty of flooding on the way.”

With every coastal inundation in Vedado, mother and son must literally take their house apart, leaving only the bare concrete in place. It isn’t only a question of moving in the conventional sense—clothing, appliances, and furniture—but also one of cleaning every screw, hinge, and lamp; every electrical installation and outlet. Otherwise, the saltpeter—that plague which is nearly imperceptible, except for its salty taste—would corrode, rust and ruin everything. Cristina and Guillermo carry their bundled possessions up to the building’s second floor. They pass the storm huddled in the stairway landing; that way they don’t have to participate in the evacuations.

Just a few months ago, in January 2016, the climatological phenomenon known as El Niño—a change in the movement of ocean currents that provokes an increase in the temperature of the Pacific’s equatorial waters and powerful atmospheric changes—suddenly brought Cuba five cold fronts,

each preceded by prefrontal atmospheric depressions. As a result, along the northwest coastline there were reports of two significant penetrations of the sea, with scarcely six days between them.

“There is a direct relationship between the arrival of El Niño and the intensity of the coastal flooding,” says Yoania Povea, meteorologist for the department of Atmospheric Physics at the nation’s most important weather studies facility, the Instituto de Meteorología (INSMET) de Casa Blanca.

Despite this fact, experts have no hesitation in describing the consecutiveness and magnitude of the inundations as extraordinarily unusual events. The Vedado district was in the headlines. Different news media closely followed the evacuation of more than a hundred residents and the evolution of the weather-related phenomena: the six-meter-high waves breaking onto the Malecón that flooded the avenue, the work of the rescue trucks from the civil defense services, and the reports of maximum levels of water accumulations.

Up to the present time, in Cuba, flooding from the sea has occurred almost exclusively as the result of usual meteorological factors—hurricanes and frontal systems—and it is generally the western regional coastline that is most severely affected. However, there is hard evidence of the effect of climate change on certain of the nation’s environmental parameters: the average annual temperature has increased 0.6 degrees Celsius since the middle of the last century; the periods of drought have increased since 1960; and in some areas of the western region, the sea level has risen almost 9 cm over the past forty years (by 2010 there had already been an increase registered of close to 2.0 ml annually).

If we take into consideration the narrowness of the country and the existence of lowlands in a great part of the Cuban coastal area, it should come as no surprise that it is precisely this issue which most worries the experts. The rise in sea level, together with the presence and activities of human beings, has contributed to the erosion and retreat of shorelines, not only in Cuba but in a large number of islands throughout the world. It has been calculated that this has been occurring over the past five centuries—although never with the severity we see today, with rising temperatures because of the increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases.

The most recent inundations in Vedado—despite their ranging from moderate to strong, and being considered the most intense of the last few years—did not require Cristina and Guillermo to move out of their basement dwelling during the storm and then return afterwards, as they have

customarily had to do. Guillermo relates that just at the corner of Fifth and Paseo there is a pump generator, and a worker from hydraulic resources was busy pumping there during the first overnight and early morning, which avoided—at least on this block—the worst of the flood accumulations.

For Cristina it was a well-deserved respite.

“Since 1967 I have lived through all of them, from the biggest to the smallest,” she says.

Experience has turned her into a kind of guru for neighbors from all of the surrounding basements, who seek her advice whenever there is approaching flooding in the forecast. And there are far more than just a few who seek her out.

“In winter, there are the cold fronts,” Guillermo says, “and in summer the hurricanes, which, when they hit from the north, bring rain and wind; when they come in from the south and last for a long time, they twist the sea up into a churning caldron that causes high waves and tides.”

That was the case, for example, with Hurricane Juan in 1985. Parking itself over the southern coast of the United States, its winds provoked sea swells in Havana, with waves between four and six meters over a period of three days. Just beyond Cristina and Guillermo’s home, on Calle Línea, the tidal floodwaters reached a depth of two meters.

Owing to the particular geographic configuration of the island—elongated, with ample areas of insular shelf—the center for marine meteorology of the INSMET usually classifies flooding incidents in accordance with wave height. According to specialized reports, this type of measurement “is very convenient for the area of Havana’s Malecón, the very form of which is conducive to flooding caused by high waves breaking over it.”

Flooding caused by waves of over five meters in height is classified as severe; when the waves are between four and five meters, it is classified as moderate; and that which is caused by waves that are less than four meters high is classified as light.

The flood waters classified as light are the only ones that don’t reach Calle Quinta, although by now Cristina seems to be beating Nature to the punch, or at least holding her own against it—she seems to be able to predict the severity of the inundations to the point of being able to avoid undergoing the house-emptying ritual in vain.

“When we dismantled the apartment” she says “it’s because we had to dismantle it.”

¶

Every year, Yoandri Marzo, age thirty-five, and her husband Mariusdelvis Lambert, thirty-two, wish they could move, but they've never been able to do so. Originally from Punta de Maisí, on the eastern reach of the island. Since the start of the new millennium they have been living in Bajos de Santa Ana, a kind of coastal ghetto—a decrepit and insalubrious little district, constructed amidst the mangrove swamps of Santa Fe, northwest of Havana, by immigrants from their native Oriente region.

Santa Fe, with twenty-six thousand people inhabiting just eight square kilometers of land, belongs to the municipality of Playa, and counts among its territory La Puntilla—one of the most iconic beaches along the entire Havana-area shoreline. It is common knowledge that over the past decades La Puntilla has suffered the erosion and loss of considerable areas of sand, as well as the progressive deterioration of its natural vegetation.

It has been estimated that towards the middle of the past century—in about 1956—the area occupied by natural vegetation consisted of 0.45 square kilometers. By 2010 that figure had already been cut in half. Human settlements are the basic reason for this loss of natural habitat. In theory, the township of Santa Fe only ought to extend up to the mouth of the Santa Ana river (which is today an arid plain with a few small, fetid puddles that occasionally sparkle reflections of the sun, alongside mounds of earth covered by a kind of sickly yellow moss).

Once, all that there was beyond the river was dense mangrove growth and a lake in which, according to area native Migdalia Hernández, the children of her generation—the 1950s and '60s—used to swim. But not any longer: ever since the middle of the 1990s this area has become a parallel, sprawling extralegal community. There are about three thousand people living in Bajos de Santa Ana—including Yoandri and Mariusdelvis—all of them originally from the eastern provinces. Their status is typical of the migrant communities that, at one time—as a result of the economic crisis that devastated the nation after the collapse of the Soviet Union—took clandestine form in many corners of Havana: confused and strictly marginal sites which the State later could neither get rid of nor condone.

Although declared to be an unhealthy neighborhood, it does have electricity, water, and if someone becomes ill they have access to free medical care. But the residents are not allowed to change the address appearing on their identification cards: they have no other legal rights and are at the

mercy of the capricious police authorities; they receive no food from the State provisions program; and children born there maintain the original address of their mother, which is to say they are registered—if indeed they are registered at all—as residents of towns they have never seen nor likely will ever set foot in, although they are permitted access to primary and secondary education in the Havana school system.

Today, in the afternoon of the first Saturday in July, under the tyrannical sun that converts Havana into an enormous candle in which everyone crackles like insects, Yoandri is digging a foundation to build a somewhat more dignified house, right next to the hut in which he has lived until now. He works barefoot, his torso bare, wearing only an old pair of jeans with the pant legs rolled up around the ankles. While not an imposing man—neither tall nor short—he is definitely rugged, without an ounce of fat on him. His skin is colored by his mestizo heritage, his hair a matted tangle of disorder. This is the type of man who has been molded by the gymnasium of pure survival.

He lays out guide lines, takes measurements, pours gravel and cement, affixes steel support rods, and opens holes in the ground with a spade. Mariusdelvis—chestnut colored and garrulous—draws diagrams in the air of the house she will leave as an inheritance to her three sons, but which as yet only exists in her imagination.

“Here’s where the living room will be,” she says. “And over here is the kitchen, and here the children’s room, and here’s our bedroom, and over there’s a little patio.”

Despite such brushstrokes of her hopes and dreams, Mariusdelvis is necessarily pragmatic.

“How long do you think it will take to finish the house?”

“At least ten years. With three children, nobody can build much of anything because right now it’s just shoes and clothing and food. We have to get the foundation finished and then get together four blocks, and it will go on like that, little by little, over time,” she says.

The two older boys—one is fourteen, the other nine—are a couple of exuberant and inoffensive youngsters who just arrived back home the beach where they had been swimming since midday. The younger daughter, just six years old, is asleep in the house, which could only be described as a monument to sadness: the floor is just dirt, and the roof is made of corrugated sheets of zinc and fiber cement; the front of the structure is slightly

inclined, and the walls are made of horizontal boards or uneven pieces of cardboard, the spaces between them a breeding ground for infection.

“This is the second time I have a girl with dengue fever,” Mariusdelvis says. “The first time they took care of her for me in Coco and Rabi [a hospital in Havana], and everything turned out fine. To tell you the truth, it was marvelous. Now, though, she is vomiting and her nose is bleeding. I took her to the Children’s Hospital, and her red blood cell count was OK, but then later it really started to go wild in her. She’s sleeping now ’cause she took some Benadryl.”

Like in a surrealist painting, a plethora of different objects and artefacts guard the dreams of the sleeping girl: a stripped down American refrigerator with blue-green splotches; two sacks of cement; an iron chair; another improvised chair, with a seatback from an old school chair and a rusted cube for a base; a black-and-white cat; broken sandals; old bags hung from a nail; a portrait of one of the brothers dressed in his elementary school uniform. And on the table, accentuating the disorder and poverty, one sees a half-filled container of water, a man’s comb, two plastic drinking glasses, various greasy rags, and a bottle of honey. Outside, on the patio, it’s more of the same: a pile of metal, washbasins, and other paraphernalia.

On a couple of occasions, Yoandri has tried to fill in the patio area with sand, to raise it up a notch or two in order to counter the attack from the coastal flooding, but both times the police have put a stop to it.

“The water has come all the way up into the living room,” says Mariusdelvis, “and as high as the window ledge. In 2005, with Hurricane Wilma, they had to come rescue us with amphibious vehicles. We lost just about everything. The hurricane knocked down the bathroom, cracked the toilet, and soaked the refrigerator and the tv.”

The reports from INSMET indicate that with Wilma, the combination of large waves and the storm surge effect from the hurricane—piled onto an astronomical high tide—caused the flooding in Bajos de Santa to reach as high as two and a half meters.

With the inundations from last January, the sea reached up only into the kitchen. Mariusdelvis doesn’t consider that to be too serious. In contrast to Vedado, the Bajos de Santa Ana neighborhood—the ghetto that really exists despite its official non-existence—was only mentioned in passing by one television reporter and a bi-weekly magazine of uncertain readership, which assured the public that only 130 residents had to be evacuated.

“With the inundations from last January, the sea reached up only into the kitchen.”

With the passing years, Mariusdelvis and Yoandri's patio also has been accumulating objects and trash deposited there by the influx of the sea, like some kind of lost package that one day, perhaps, someone will come to collect.

TWO

THE RESIDENTS OF THE BASEMENT APARTMENTS IN VEDADO—so close to the shoreline—are people who have wanted to go elsewhere but who have never been able to find anyone willing to trade places with them. The basements of Vedado have become apartments only by virtue of the fact that Cuba's effervescent and intransigent housing crisis has resulted in the idea that absolutely any roof at all over one's head is sufficient to serve as a dwelling space. This is especially the case in Vedado—a central, active, and in a certain sense luxurious or cosmopolitan neighborhood. If the inhabitants of the basements-turned-apartments complained about having to live where they do, it's more than likely they would be met with gales of derisive laughter from the residents of many other, far worse neighborhoods: not just the inhabitants of Bajos de Santa Ana, but those who live in Old Havana; those who live in the rundown former palaces of Havana Center, and amid the cracking walls of San Miguel Padrón; and those in the micro-brigade buildings in Alamar.

But if you look closely, there is a clear difference in terms of distinction and comfort between the basement apartments of Vedado and the normal apartments on the other floors of those same buildings. This difference of status—if we have to call it something—doesn't manifest itself here, as it does in other neighborhoods, in terms of divisions between north-south or east-west, but rather in terms of upstairs-downstairs.

Nevertheless, in the apartment shared by Cristina and Guillermo there is a visible sense of cleanliness and order, elements that are only possible after achieving a certain level of economic stability.

"Don't kid yourself," Guillermo says, "it's hard to keep the house this way. You have to live above it."

The living room, the kitchen, and the dining room are all painted white. The bathroom has laminated up to the ceiling. The walls of the bedrooms are finished in Jaimanita stone, which repels the saltpeter. They have man-

aged to keep adversity in check without renouncing ornamentation.

The basement apartment in the building at 462 Calle Quinta belongs to Leonel Ramírez, a man in his early forties with a full head of white hair. His space does show signs of the effects of the coastal inundations: chunks of plaster that have lifted up, deteriorated walls, the marks left by repeated cement patching, and the bricks—the exoskeleton of the building’s structure—left exposed. The air swirls with a fine dust from the constant erosion of materials.

“The brick is like a sponge,” Leonel explains, “it just sucks up the moisture constantly until another piece of the wall crumbles off.”

Leonel knows of other houses in which entire walls have collapsed. That’s why he has broken open his walls a few centimeters above the floor, just above the baseboards, so that the humidity has a chance to drain out.

“Once the sea level goes down and the flood waters recede, it’s almost as if the walls begin to weep. You have to open up ventilation points so they don’t implode on you.”

Accustomed to the flooding from over twenty years here, Leonel has learned how best to take the blows. And he has an entertaining repertoire of anecdotes. He is one of those guys who, in the midst of the flooding will venture out into the streets to hunt for whatever flotsam and jetsam floats his way, a practice that is not unknown even among members of the civil defense rescue teams.

“A few years ago those guys had a little boat capsize on them, and they lost I don’t know how many cases of beer. Also, when they come to rescue you they end up confiscating all the things you have managed to collect for yourself.”

Leonel has seen people who, thanks to the flooding, have found furniture, clothing, shoes, even air conditioners, although such electrical appliances generally end up ruined by contact with the salt water. Leonel usually goes out with a nylon bag strapped to his chest like a fisherman, to try to catch whatever ends up floating nearby.

“There have been floods here that caught everyone by surprise and that broke open the windows of the shops on Avenida Paseo. There were crates of food floating in the streets.”

Leonel recalls how, during the flooding caused by El Niño in 1997, a friend of his came into possession of thirty-two Reebok sports shoes, thanks to the nearby athletic gear store at the corner of Calle Primera and Calle B; the only problem was, they were all only for the right foot.

“Afterwards, he had to keep going back to the store and, little by little, steal the ones for the left foot.”



In forty years of coastal flooding, Cristina has been evacuated by motorboat, has spent days in schools and shelters, and has seen how her neighbors have suffered to the point of collapse from pulmonary infections. She has seen how the water has torn apart the apartments in the district that belonged to people who were traveling when the storm hit; how at the Riviera Hotel—located at Avenida Paseo and Calle Primera—a loose container that had been swept out to sea had been returned by it again at full force, smashing the building’s windows. She has seen people with the floodwaters up to their chests guiding furniture through the current like they were herding cattle, pushing their belongings with their hands like expert matadors playing with bulls. And she has seen how the pressure of the sea looks for a point—any point—of escape, lifting up toilets from the floors of bathrooms and smashing them against the ceiling.

Later, Cristina has had to clean her house with high pressure spray hoses, to get rid of the scabs of saltpeter, the slicks of gasoline, and the excrement that the flooding has brought. She has had to disinfect her water tank during periods of several days at a time, something that the public health inspectors insist on with particular emphasis, so as to prevent any outbreaks of disease.

Today, in order to enter her home, it is necessary to jump over a half-meter-high wall that Guillermo erected around stairs by which one descends to it. It’s a sign that they are both resigned to continue living where they are. Considering the impossibility of moving elsewhere, they have decided to perch themselves here as best they can.

In short, for forty years Cristina has witnessed and suffered through each and every coastal flood that has hit Havana.

“Has the government spoken to you about any solution to the problem?”

“Various projects have been proposed. Building a dyke on the Malecón, placing concrete breakwaters along the base of the seawall; but nothing has happened,” says Guillermo.

“I will die before I see anything happen,” Cristina adds. “They always talk, but they never do anything.”

Like in so many other parts of Vedado—and in general throughout

Havana—just behind Cristina and Guillermo’s building, in the middle of the block formed by Avenida Paseo and the Calles A, Tercera, and Quinta, there’s a vacant lot which they suggested might be a good place for putting up a building the basement dwellers could move into.

The idea, which ostensibly sounds preposterous—asking the State to build something new when it can barely keep aloft and functioning what is already there—has been discussed even by specialists, as part of an urban planning strategy for getting underway sixteen different projects aimed at countering the effects of climate change in the country.

Dr. Eduardo Planos, chairman of the National Science Program on Climate Change in Cuba, has spoken of territorial ordering in the coastal zones “fundamentally in the rigorous understanding of the dangers, the vulnerabilities, and the risks, and in light of the future scenarios of rising sea levels.” Among the visible effects of climate change is exactly that—the rise in average sea level, which is what most directly affects Cuba, along with most other islands and archipelagos. Today, some 3.5 million people live within at least a few kilometers of the Cuban seacoast, and in the coastal areas themselves there is the nothing frivolous total of 246 towns. It is estimated that at current rates, by 2050 Cuba may well see disappear almost two thousand seven hundred square kilometers of surface territory and lose nine thousand dwellings.

“The cold fronts are qualified as weak, strong or moderate,” says Reinaldo Casals, specialist in the department of marine meteorology at the Instituto de Meteorología de Casa Blanca. “Since the 1950s the number of weak cold fronts has increased. Before that it would seem to have been even worse, which means there’s no reason to conclude that coastal flooding is a consequence of climate change. It’s always been a reality. And the El Niño phenomenon is cyclical—erratically cyclical, which is to say that it doesn’t have a fixed periodicity, but it occurs in cycles—and that has nothing to do with climate change, either.”

But while it isn’t the culprit unleashing today’s coastal flooding, what climate change can do—and does—is increase the intensity of the flooding. In 2007 the council of ministers agreed to implement a “National Plan to Confront Climate Change,” among whose objectives is sketching out the conclusion of what it called the “coastal vulnerability macroproject” and developing a network to monitor conditions in the coastal areas.

Various groups of scientific-technical studies, comprised of more than

seventeen institutions and close to one hundred fifty specialists, have projected “scenarios of danger related to the rise in sea levels by the year 2050,” with results that are frankly alarming: an increase of 27 cm in the sea level, with a loss of more than 2 percent of land surfaces, along with their respective ecosystems, including a retrogression inland of 1 m of the coastline, and the serious deterioration of almost 20 percent of the nation’s mangrove jungles.

“That is the general picture of climate change in Cuba,” says Dailys Rodríguez, geographer and specialist in coastal management issues. “But there is even greater fear about what might happen—about what those changes could cause, about the way in which they could worsen the environmental damage that already exists—than there is concern about what is currently happening.”

In Bajos de Santa Ana, according to Mariusdelvis, “even with just the changes in the phases of the moon the seawater is coming into the houses. And when everything fills up with water, it’s a problem: the children can’t even go to school then.” If, effectively, this phenomenon were to worsen even more, the entire Bajos de Santa Ana neighborhood, which has been built in the heart of the mangrove swamp, will be destined to disappear.

This human settlement brought with it the clandestine felling of trees, and the consequent loss of tree crown coverage, without any current regeneration whatsoever. The species of red mangrove, dark mangrove, and white mangrove constitute an important factor for the ecosystem in the river’s delta area of the Havana coastal plain.

“The mangroves are undervalued,” says Dailys Rodríguez, “but they are one of the best natural defenses against hurricanes, and they absorb salinity; they’re like filters. They prevent the water in the agricultural areas from getting polluted—they help to prevent the salt and sweet waters from getting mixed together in the water table. They’re also incredibly sensitive. A lot of water kills them; too little water kills them; garbage kills them. It’s clear that human settlement in the mangrove swamp disrupts the natural equilibrium.”

What Mariusdelvis and the rest of her neighbors want more than anything is to leave. Three years ago, the police and officials from the border guards confiscated a carpentry workshop that Yoandri had set up in his patio in order to build a boat so he could launch off into the Florida Straits.

“They took everything, every last nail and screw. They left me with nothing. I had to work like a slave to put food on the table for our kids. They

slapped me with a penalty of six thousand pesos, which I paid off in installments, ten pesos at a time.”

“I hope they give us a house,” says Mariusdelvis. “It’s what they should do.”

“No, I don’t want anything,” Yoandri interrupts. “I make my own way, little by little. I don’t want anything from them [the State]. What I want is for them to leave me alone and let me do my work in peace. I don’t want them to give me gifts; I just want them to stop taking from me.”

Yoandri expresses what seems to be a general feeling, especially among Cubans under the age of forty. They just want the State to stay out of their lives. They don’t want the State to try to help, because their attempts at helping bring who-knows-what consequences along with them. They view the State as a kind of tailor who has lost track of the people’s measurements, and whose clothing, regardless of how carefully it is designed, is guaranteed never to fit right.

“A cylinder of gas costs one hundred twenty pesos; if the police catch you with one, they take it from you,” Yoandri says. “You buy a dump truck, and five minutes later they are knocking on your door. They don’t let you breathe. If the police catch you in the street with an address from Oriente province on your identification, they take you to the station and fine you thirty or forty pesos. They tell you that you’re not from here. But there’s a sign at the entry to Havana that says the capital city belongs to all the Cubans. Aren’t we Cubans? You want to legalize yourself, get your paperwork in order, but they won’t let you do it; nobody will attend to you in any of the institutions.”

Bajos de Santa Ana is also an embarkation point from which many people tend to launch themselves into the sea, to try to get to the United States—especially young people. It happens all the time. Yoandri himself wonders why he is building a new house—once again, in the mangrove swamp: in a tiny village that before too long will most likely disappear. The coastal ecosystems that have not been able to adapt themselves to the alterations produced by climate change are those that also suffer from the arbitrary presence of human beings. Nature, on its own, seems to end up reaching its own kind of accord.

At any rate, it isn’t an equilibrium that Yoandri wants to continue disturbing.

“I have to set off on a raft. If I make it, OK; and if not, I don’t. But I have to try it. Everyone does it. And I’m poor. And that’s what poor people do. The only thing a poor person does is try to survive.”

MAYA GODED

The last Cinderella









1997 – 2015

I have been taking these photographs for many years. They attest to my taste for observing other women, for reflecting on femininity, on the rituals of beauty, and on important events for Mexican women such as their “coming out” parties when they turn fifteen. In a word, for what it means and implies to be a woman in the Catholic society of Mexico City.

www.mayagoded.net

























LEO FELIPE CAMPOS

There Are the Traces of Those Bullets

“ The official homicide figures in Venezuela are a mystery, owing to lack of transparency, (...)”

THE ONLY TIME HIS FATHER ASKED HIM FOR A PISTOL was when he was twelve years old. It is the last memory he has of his father: he said he had been robbed and wanted to take revenge. The boy got the firearm though one of his maternal uncles and gave it to his father, who was married to another woman, not to his mother. The woman was away and his father went to look for her. He found her in bed with another man, shot them both, and then killed himself.

“What was the name of your father?”

“Miguel, like me.”

He was twelve years old when a classmate took his pencil and eraser. But no one used his name anymore. They called him Miguelón.

They started fighting. A boy’s fight, until his classmate ran off to get his older brother, who was armed. He went to tell his uncles, his mother’s brothers. The result: a shootout. The first *culebra* had just been born in the neighborhood: that is what personal conflicts in the poorer zones are called (a ‘saga,’ or even a ‘soap opera,’ but literally a ‘snake’). San Agustín, Caracas, Venezuela. It was the early 1990s.

“Did you go back to school?”

“After that, never.”

Years before, they had defended him in the same way, when he was going to visit his father and a young guy tried to rob him. He took off down a ravine, told his mother, called his uncles, and they responded with bullets.

“How old were you when you learned to shoot?”

“Fourteen.”

His stepfather, who was a criminal, had a daughter with his mother, and he was jealous of his stepsister. He told his mother and his stepfather left him alone. He moved in with his grandmother.

“Where did you sleep?”

“I shared a cot with one of my uncles.”

They eliminated his older uncle first, at a funeral. He had killed someone

and this someone's father took revenge. Then it was his younger uncle's turn: his own group plotted against him. That's what Miguelón says, who tried to get a revolver from outside the hillside neighborhood to protect himself. He had friends in other parts of Caracas because he played basketball in intercommunal tournaments. His uncles sold drugs.

"And you?"

"Not me. Not yet."

Later on a guy humiliated him on basketball court. He fired at him and the guy had to take off. He said to his mother: "No fucking way I'm going to let myself get killed." He felt alone: he had his cousins, but they were on their way to becoming criminals as well, and a friend, but without his uncles it wasn't the same. It was then he bought his first pistol. A 7-millimeter. Those who were threatening him lived nearby. That's how it usually is: the characters in a *culebra* have known each other all their lives. They get into a conflict, and then they start to study each other, vowing to kill. They shoot. Especially at night.

"How old were you?"

"Seventeen."

He belonged to a gang called "The Bus," which had gained a certain prestige in criminal circles. For those who grow up in the law of the hillside the most important thing is the cartel, and that means having a good firearm and being able to instill fear. *No one is more of a crook than anyone else*, goes a popular saying in the neighborhoods. They call it respect. Miguelón sold drugs: marijuana and crack, mostly. He stole. He started accumulating power. He was at the "wheel" of the "car" in his sector, which is to say he made the decisions in his gang. He was a ladies' man. He liked drinking and sports.

"Were you still living with your grandmother at that time?"

"No, I was living with Yelitza, my first wife."

Yelitza got pregnant, but she lost the baby at birth. In a shootout a lady was killed by accident. A stray bullet. He never knew whether that bullet had come from The Bus or another gang. The lady was the mother-in-law of his half-sister (his father's daughter) and she never found out he was involved in the killing.

"You have a half-sister?"

"Yes, but I don't get along with her. I met my nephew around that time, who is also in a gang. He came around and I was giving him some advice. In twenty years we had never really talked. That was just a while ago, because my aunt died and I went down for the funeral. My sister didn't even remember me. She saw me and looked startled: she thought I was going to kill her."

“Why?”

“Because after my father killed her mother and himself, she came by my father’s house and took his clothes and burnt them. She was older than me. When that happened I was still little and they began to tell me things. I wanted to kill her and her mother as well.”

The police began to go after the members of The Bus, entering the neighborhood to root out the gang. Miguelón fled and hid out in Caucagua, a village in the state of Miranda. He left a girl pregnant there, but she never told him, he says. When things calmed down, he returned to San Agustín and had another kid without knowing. After a while he got back together with Yelitza, who got pregnant again. Another daughter was born. This one he got to know immediately.

“Are you still with Yelitza?”

“No, I’m going to tell you.”

Since then, instead of settling down, the nights of robberies, partying, and women continued. At one of the many parties, the *culebra* made an appearance with all guns blazing. They killed one of his buddies, shot one of his cousins in the eye, and left him with a bullet in the shoulder. They were taken to the hospital. Someone informed Yelitza, whose was at her place with the baby, eleven months old at the time. She went to look for him and got trapped between the bullets fired from where the party was and those fired in response from a nearby street. She ended up with a lethal wound. They took her to the hospital where Miguelón was. They met in the emergency room. He was surprised and asked what the hell she was doing there.

“Why are you bleeding like this? Where’s the baby?”

The doctors couldn’t save her.

It was then that Miguelón knew more than ever, more than when they tried to rob him for the first time, more than when his father killed himself with the pistol he had given him, more than when he thought his mother loved him less than his half-sister, more than when they killed his uncles, more than when he lost his baby, knew more than ever that he wanted revenge, he wanted to kill someone, to finish off everything. He didn’t care anymore.

He was twenty-five years old. Now he’s thirty-six, he has five children and seven bullets lodged in his body, and he’s in a wheelchair.



The story of Miguelón is not an eccentricity in a country with a murder rate of 70 for every 100,000 inhabitants, according to the estimate of researcher Dorothy

Kronick, higher than the official figures but lower than the estimates of other NGOs, such as the Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia. Venezuela is one of the most dangerous countries in the world and its capital city a leading producer of bullet-riddled corpses.

Among the thirty-two parishes that make up Caracas, San Agustín, where Miguelón lives, has an officially estimated 50,000 inhabitants, scattered over the hillsides, and several people interviewed claim to have been aware of at least nine murders through May and June of 2016 alone. One of these crimes was widely known, since it occurred inside one of the cable cars of the Metrocable, a mass transport system that connects the residents of the hillside neighborhood with the lower parts of the city.

Jesús Galarraga, who has lived in the area since his birth thirty-three years ago recounts that he was in the next car and witnessed the murder:

“The dude didn’t even realize it was coming. He was looking at his cellphone when the door opened and the other guy came in, pointed a gun at his face and bam! They killed another guy around here a little while ago,” he says, pointed to where we are standing. “The dude jumped off down there and they were waiting for him. That’s why the station is closed and only this door is open, and why so many police are around.”

He is referring to the façade of the Metrocable in La Ceiba, which connects with a street in the neighborhood. A few meters further down is a school of the Catholic organization “Faith and Joy,” where the victim studied. Like Miguelón, before they expelled him, and like most of the residents of the zone, who can be seen entering or leaving the station at all hours. Beside it is the basketball court, called “For Peace and Life,” crowning an enormous five-storey building, a project of the *chavista* government of the Capital District.

On the lower levels there is market and a pharmacy, which are usually closed. On the other floors there are rooms for educational, dance, and drama workshops and also some exhibition spaces. They give percussion classes and some of the students of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra can be found there.

The sporting facilities are protected by fences mounted on low concrete walls. The ceiling is high. Because they are on a fifth floor (and the slope of a mountain), the view takes in everything on all sides: a baseball field, vacant lots, houses, stairways and dogs, greenery, busy thoroughfares, towers and monuments, like icons of twentieth-century modernist architecture, and the bifurcating contours of the outskirts of the city, losing themselves in the distance. It is there, with a view from the heights, that they play basketball.

As I converse with Galarraga, a little girl approaches from one side. She is his niece and plays the violin. She has just finished a class with the symphony orchestra. She says hello and tells him that the teacher is teaching them a “really crazy” piece of music that she likes a lot. A dialogue begins between the two:

“And your mother?”

“Down below.”

“When are you going to come up? Come up one weekend.”

“I don’t know, uncle. Things are dangerous. I was going to come the last time but my mom decided against it. Maybe this weekend, God willing, if nothing serious happens.”

The girl leaves. The man pauses briefly.

“Do you see? That’s how the kids think. She’s only seven years old.”

San Agustín has an acknowledged reputation in the city for both criminality and culture. This neighborhood, with its thousands of makeshift dwellings stretching out along the slopes, alleyways that wind steeply down under zinc roofs, high-tension wires, steel rods, cement blocks, and clothes drying in the sun, as if something were always being built, has produced musicians, artists, and athletes, but also armed robbers, drug traffickers, and murderers.

Crime and its configuration in this neighborhood, however, take a different form of action than in other dangerous zones of Caracas, such as El Valle, El Cementerio, and Cota 905, which are connected with one another by the upper parts of the mountains and where the federal government has centered the so-called People’s Liberation and Protection Operation, an effort to combat the criminal gangs, which have established alliances among themselves, by a full-scale police operation.

According to journalists, researchers, government officials, and even the criminals themselves, these alliances, this “peace” among malefactors, is an order from the prisons, where just a word from one of a gang leaders, called a *pran*, can be a death sentence. The *pranes* decide what is done and not done in the prison cells, wards, and yards. They are incarcerated, but they impose their law both inside and out: they have cellphones, money, and high-caliber firearms. They use their contacts and move networks that connect them with people on the streets, in the gangs, and in the justice system.

Where the malefactors’ “peace” exists, there are codes and procedures for escape, burglary, robbery, extortion, kidnapping, the sale of drugs, murders, executions, and the concealment, dismembering, and disposal of bodies. Hierarchies are respected, as well as whatever the criminals on another hillside are

doing, because the enemy is the same: the men in uniform, whether the police or the national guard. Anyone who “runs a light,” who transgresses an unwritten rule, is eliminated.

The “peace” lasted for only a short time in San Agustín, because there are many gangs, and no single leader. That is the first thing Miguelón told me when we met. Galarraga thinks the same, and he mentions a policy implemented by the police in Venezuela, as part of a project established by the government in 2013, of not patrolling certain areas controlled by the criminal gangs. The project was called Movement for Peace and Life, but it only worked for a few months.

“There were negotiations with the criminals so that the shooting would end and they could hand over their arms, but they just took a break to arms themselves even better and continue to rob in the streets. These are things everyone knows. Until the time came for the problems to begin again and now it’s worse than ever. Why? Because these kids have military-style assault weapons. Around here there are weeks with up to five murders.”

The official homicide figures in Venezuela are a mystery, owing to lack of transparency, but journalists, research institutes and human rights NGOs make estimates that are reported in the press. The numbers for June 2016 are alarming: five hundred corpses with bullet wounds were received by the National Service of Medicine and Forensic Sciences, better known as the Bello Monte morgue, in Caracas. It was one of the most violent months on record.

In the neighborhood of El Cementerio, Richard Soares (not his real name), a retailer of Portuguese origin, recounts that a well-known gang member of the Cota 905 sector, nicknamed “El Coki,” has called him to ask for thirty kilos of meat. It has happened twice. El Coki sends some guys on motorcycles to pick up the order and pays a price that does not allow Soares to make a profit, but that does allow him to maintain his peace of mind. This young man, a partner in a butcher’s shop and another grocery store, has lived amongst the criminals in the area since he was a child. He says he grew up with them and they all know and respect each other, but that at the beginning of 2016 an order came down from the highest ranks of El Cementerio: all businesspeople in the area had to pay for a monthly “vaccination,” a euphemism used to refer to a periodic extortion payment.

“It’s not like I’m their buddy, but I’ve spoken with the *pranes* down there. We have a relationship. They protect me, because when I get a shipment of food, I call them and their family members never have to wait in line, and you know, with the scarcity of food now, they are grateful for that. But they had to make an agreement with the higher-ups to charge me, even though they used to hate

each other, just couldn't stand to look at each other. I also give these guys meat for their cookouts now and then."

"And have they ever invited you?"

"A couple of times, but what do you think? One afternoon they came to get me, they put me on a motorcycle and I had to go to negotiate. In the other stores they thought I was being kidnapped. When I got there it was like talking to a businessman, except that there were a few armed guys around, with grenades, rifles, everything."

"How many were there approximately?"

"More than forty. They gave me something to drink. We discussed things calmly. In the end, since I knew the guys down below, they charged me only 150,000 *bolívares* a month. That was at the beginning of the year, but they have informed me it's going to go up soon because of inflation. The crisis affects us all, daddy. A lady who has a store on the corner didn't want to pay for the "vaccination," so they kidnapped her, threatened her, and took ten thousand dollars from her. Now she's paying her part."

In the middle of 2016, those 150,000 *bolívares* were equivalent to nine minimum salaries in Venezuela. In addition, Soares pays two policemen to escort him to the highway when he closes up for the night. The amount is about the same. He pays a total of twenty minimum salaries a month to feel more or less safe. Until the extortion payments go up.

It is not an exaggeration to say that all of the residents of Caracas, wherever they may live and whatever their socioeconomic level, have been either mugged, kidnapped, or extorted, or have a friend or family member who has been the victim of one of these crimes, or even murdered. In order to combat this, the federal government implemented the People's Liberation and Protection Operation (known as the OLP by its initials in Spanish), the twenty-second security plan during the seventeen years the regime has been in power.

The OLP started in July 2015, but it had no publically acknowledged legal framework, nor was its scope clearly defined in the official government gazette in which the executive's decrees are announced. Meanwhile, the *chavista* leaders repeated their own notion of the problem like a mantra: the fight was not against common criminals, but rather against paramilitaries financed by an abstract "right wing" which put the mega-gangs together and trained their soldiers.

In Venezuela, munitions fall within the exclusive legal competence of the State, but the use of grenades, assault weapons, and machine guns is common among the gangs. How do the criminals acquire them? Although the government

claims to be the victims, part of the problem is the traffic in arms and ammunition by members of the police and the armed forces.

A year after its implemented, the OLP had eliminated some well-known drug traffickers, killers, and ex-convicts, but it had not produced the justice or pacification it had promised, according to the appraisal of Keymer Ávila, a researcher at the Penal Studies Center of the Universidad Central de Venezuela, and to the spokespersons of victims' groups such as the Comité de Familiares de las Víctimas. On the contrary, the violence had increased as a result of armed confrontations and abuse of power. The Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos and Human Rights Watch published a report in April of 2016 that disclosed the existence of mass arrests, mistreatment of prisoners, forced evictions, and at least twenty extrajudicial killings.

Alexander Torres, thirty years old and a the father of two children, has lived all his life in the sector known as El 70 in El Valle, a Caracas neighborhood dominated by criminal activity. His house is near a place where members of the gangs congregate, visibly carrying their firearms. He negotiated with them for the use of a piece of land for religious purposes. Alexander attends an evangelical church and says that he has never been mugged there, but that since the police are in the streets as a result of the OLP, the prevailing order has changed and the gang members have fled or are in hiding. Their leader was killed by the Policía Nacional Bolivariana.

"I can go anywhere with the gangs around: I even feel safer when I see them. But now I'm concerned because they're gone and the police are taking money from people. They stop you and if they can get "a few *reales*" out of you, they keep them. People don't know their rights and a policeman makes them scared. He has a gun, he can make you disappear: you know how it is. Of course they're not all like that.

"Do the criminals of El 70 prohibit muggings in the neighborhood?"

"They show you a lot of respect, and even more to the evangelicals. Sometimes they come around and say: 'Hey, man, give me a blessing here. Look, I've got a problem with my wife.' I have received drug traffickers, street dealers: there was one who went to my house and started crying. A few months ago some girls arrived from Valencia: they had some money and were robbed and killed by some members of El 70, but the leader of the gang himself had the guys eliminated, because they had 'run a light.'"

¶

Poisoned with hate following the killing of Yelitza, the mother of his daughter, Miguelón set on fire the house of the people who had killed her, though it was empty at the time. He continued his criminal ways, combined with partying and basketball games, until he met a seventeen-year-old girl named Haiskel and fell in love. She asked him to quit the life of crime. They had a son and he began to go straight, but he was still a ladies' man, so he soon tired of Haiskel and moved in with someone else.

He committed fewer and fewer robberies, but in the course of one of them he was caught by the police: they confiscated his pistol and let him go the same night, after he had paid a bribe. One of his buddies owed him some money, so he warned him he had better pay up or accept the consequences.

On June 6th, 2010 he went to a party. He was still unarmed following the unsuccessful robbery. He was about to leave, when they put on some *tambor*, music meant for dancers who like to move their hips and to sweat. A woman asked him to stay and dance. He was dancing when he heard his name being shouted over the sound of the drums. He didn't have time to turn around completely.

One.

Two shots.

In the back.

His own buddy.

He wanted to kill him before he had to pay back the money he owed him.

Miguelón ended up in the hospital again. He swore he would get revenge, but his spinal column short-circuited and his legs no longer responded. The specialists told him he would never walk again. He began his rehabilitation in San Agustín, under some Cuban doctors. Haiskel, the mother of his child, convinced him to attend an evangelical church. For the first time he asked himself what sense his life had had up until then.

"My mentality started to change. I used to be afraid to go out and would say: 'If the *culebra* comes by and sees me in a wheelchair, they'll kill me.' But then I began to fight. I had separated from the mother of my son and was with the other girl, who had gotten pregnant, but I was wary of her and expected her to cheat on me. I broke it off. I talked with Haiskel and talked with my son. Haiskel agreed to get back together, on certain conditions, and she helped me with my rehabilitation. It was a struggle, a tremendous process, but little by little I lifted myself back up. Through willpower."

He stood up again within a few weeks. Although he can go short distances

on crutches, he gets tired quickly and lives in a wheelchair now. That is how he confronted the man who had shot him in the back. He told him he could have killed him, but that it didn't matter anymore. He forgave him.

"That guy is still alive, but he's worse off than I am."

"How so?"

"Because he lives confined within four walls, or in hiding: he can't go out. They killed someone around here last week: he was there and they fired at him as well. They had to get him out of the neighborhood."

Miguelón was saved by basketball. At the inauguration of the "For Peace and Life" court next to the La Ceiba Metrocable station, he asked if he could coach the kids and teenagers who wanted to work with him. He had never done it before, and his physical condition would make it even more difficult, but he started with six kids and within a month there were thirty.

Today he is in charge of maintaining the facilities, out of his own funds. He has keys to open and close, practices with the city team for people with disabilities, and has been working every week for five years with the boys and girls of his Team Work school, whom he never tires of telling there are few options to keep from falling into crime. He gives himself as an example: half-shaven, sitting in a wheelchair, in Bermuda shorts or faded jeans, he raises his index finger to his head, sometimes covered by a cap, and rather drily, sarcastically, shows his wounds. His legs are thinner than his arms, almost just bones lined with skin. He doesn't ask them, he demands of them: not to follow in his footsteps, or they will end up walking like him.

His girlfriend Haiskel says she was doubtful about Miguelón's role as a coach, because he didn't change from one day to the next. He continued drinking and often made mistakes. But he spoke about "rescuing those kids" and she realized he had another motivation. When the "For Peace and Life" court was undergoing repairs for a while, he went down to another farther away, called "The Plan," and started to coach there too.

"The Miguelón of before was irresponsible, even with his children," says Haiskel. "Now he thinks of others first, especially the kids on the court. He supports them with their dreams and he talks straight to them, saves them from just hanging around and doing what everyone here does every day, which is the gang life."

I met this man through the nonprofit organization "Caracas mi convive," which fosters reconciliation and forgiveness through actions of harmonious coexistence in spaces plagued by violence. It is an initiative that began in 2013 and has now extended to more than sixteen neighborhoods in Caracas, always

buttressed by the support of a community leader. Miguelón, who used to be a criminal—a thief, a crack seller, a killer—is that leader today. He collects donations for his basketball players. He protects the space.

“You can’t say anything to the kids who are in gangs today, but there have been problems around here and I’ve had to go down and say: ‘Hey, man, what’s up? You know I’m just dealing with good kids now, people who are into sports: I’m out of the crime business.’ And they’re like: ‘OK, take it easy. We know you’re just on your court.’”

This Friday afternoon, Miguelón is shouting from his wheelchair to the stands. He takes seriously his job as a referee in the intercommunal tournament he organizes. He carries around a notebook in which he jots down information and reviews the schedules of the upcoming games.

Beside him is Yhaderlyn, a dark-skinned brunette who records the game stats: time, points, and fouls. She is twenty-one years old. She grew up in San Agustín, but when the Metrocable was built the government offered her family another place to live and they moved. She has also attended all the practice sessions for the last three years and, like the other girls, respects her trainer. They feel solidarity with him. They love him. Yhaderlyn is finishing her third year of accounting at the military college Universidad Nacional Experimental Politécnica de la Fuerza Armada. She plays on the university basketball team but insists the training at La Ceiba is more physical and complete.

“Miguelón is demanding. He likes us to be disciplined, to behave ourselves, even off the court. He wants us to see sports as a lifestyle. He tells us, even if are losing by a lot of points, not to give up. Win or lose, but giving it all we’ve got. Yesterday they killed a guy near here, at the roundabout, and my mom told me not to come. That is something that demotivates us. There have been shootouts right in here—there are the traces of those bullets—but Miguelón always talks about his own situation and motivates us.”

This afternoon Haiskel is watching the practice session with her eight-month-old baby in her arms, Miguelón’s youngest daughter. She says that the group receives little support from the parents and the rest of the community. There are events attended by music, dance, and theater groups in the area, but what the basketball coach and his kids have is the result of their own efforts, of money raised with raffles and tournaments, or from donations such as those made by the nonprofit “Caracas mi convive.”

Miguelón uses plastic chairs and little cones to mark out the exercises, old balls that he split open with a knife and filled with sand for strength exercises,

and even the spectator seating for jumping and running up and down. To keep themselves hydrated they have a decrepit old thermos. Before each session, they go for water, which is generally given to them by the Metrocable staff, but in recent weeks they have had to get it elsewhere, and today the water has a greenish tinge. Some of the youngsters prefer not to drink it, in spite of their fatigue.

Rommel is the tallest, almost six feet tall. He is strong, but his movements are not very fluid. There is one exercise he can't manage: get himself with both feet up to the next step of the stands. He is afraid of falling. Miguelón calls him over and asks him to jump on the ground. The youngster does so. Then he is asked to do the same thing with a forward motion.

"If you feel unsure about yourself, you're never going to achieve what you want. Have confidence in yourself."

Miguelón stands him next to the stairs and tells him to try. Rommel hesitates and raises only one foot. The coach gives him a boost and the boy breathes deeply. He closes his eyes and clenches his fists. He raises himself up and, for at least two seconds, flies above his fears. Two of his teammates applaud. The coach turns around with a smile.

During the tournament, which may last months, Miguelón acts as referee, with the whistle in his mouth, because he needs his hands to move his wheelchair. He goes from one end of the court to the other, speeding up, braking, going forward and in reverse. He cracks a joke. He laughs, showing his crooked teeth. His mouth is a city struck by an earthquake.

At one point in the game he goes to one side and takes a brush to wipe away the little puddles of water behind one of the baskets, the result of the rain. He complains about the lack of resources. He says the kids are great, but they don't have proper sneakers and deserve better.

At the end of the last game on this Friday, some of the youngsters stay around talking and others practicing throws. Suddenly shots are heard. They come from a street running alongside the ground floor, next to a group of buildings where two of Miguelón's female students live. One of them looks down from above while she texts on her cellphone.

The coach is anxious. He moves in the wheelchair toward the fence to try and see better what is happening down below, some fifty meters away. There is a lot of excitement on the court. Everyone is curious, commenting on the events. Several boys of the same age come up from below. They are armed and running to hide and get into the buildings. People stop to watch in the street or from the windows of their apartments. The gunshots stop and start again.

The echo of the gunshots makes it difficult to know where they are coming from, until a group of four men and two women come out carrying a wounded youngster. They are holding him by each arm and each leg as they walk. They try to stop a motorcycle, but the driver refuses to slow down. They curse and insult him. The shots continue. Five, seven minutes. Almost an eternity. Finally, they manage to stop another person on a motorcycle. From a distance is it difficult to know where the blood is coming from. The youngster cannot hold himself up. From the waist down he is just a red jelly. They put him on the motorcycle between the driver and someone else who agrees to go with him.

Above, on the basketball court, Jesús Galarraga says:

“Do you see? That is our culture.”

Someone else completes the idea and throws out with a smile:

“Welcome to the neighborhood, pal.”

The incessant bouncing of balls has given way to whispers. The youngsters stand with their arms folded. They ask if anyone knew the guy who was shot. They speculate. The basketballs sit untouched on the floor. The game has finished for today. The sun is going down and the city can be seen in the distance, imposing, with its hills and cement structures, like an unmovable billboard full of ants. Miguelón decides to close and tells everyone to put everything away. In response to the silence of the group, he remarks in an even tone:

“OK, this is getting ugly, man. You guys can run if you want, not me.”

The next day, the tournament continues.

It is the turn of the girls coached by Miguelón, playing against a team of boys.

To keep things fair, Miguelón will not be the referee. He will give instructions from the sidelines, tell off the players, raise his eyebrows. He will clench his jaws and close his eyes, as he does when he doesn't like something.

It will be a difficult game, with lots of fouls and hard play. Tempers will flare while a mantle of fine light filters in from one side. Miguelón will make a joke before rubbing his hands together to celebrate a play.

They will play with spirit. There will be shouts of encouragement. Passions will float over the court and then settle down like dew on the hillside. For the moment, only the game will exist. There will be nothing else. In the end, the girls will lose by a point, but they will go down fighting and you can see it in their eyes: they run toward the opposite basket until the last second, believing they can win.

RODRIGO ABD

Razed Earth



1. *A man walks on carpets crossed by water in La Pampa in the Madre de Dios region of Peru, on Friday, May 2nd, 2014. Soldiers, the police, and the marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in Peru's southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios. The authorities began enforcing a ban on illegal mining Monday in the Huepetube district. Before the deadline, miners clashed with police, while intermittently blocking traffic on the Interoceanic Highway that links the Pacific with Brazil.*





2. This aerial view, taken on November 11th, 2014, shows tailings in La Pampa produced by informal mining in the Madre de Dios region. Some 1,200 soldiers, police, and marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in the southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios. The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP20 or CMP10) will be held in Lima, Peru, from December 1st to 12th, 2014.

3. Men strain water in order to obtain the sand and gold in La Pampa in the Madre de Dios region of Peru on Friday, May 2nd, 2014. Soldiers, police, and marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in Peru's southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios. The authorities began enforcing a ban on illegal mining Monday in the Huepetube district. Before the deadline, miners clashed with police, intermittently blocking traffic on the Inter-oceanic Highway that links the Pacific with Brazil.



It is known as La Pampa, a territory of 50,000 hectares of tropical rain forest razed by the fever for gold. It is in the Madre de Dios region in southeastern Peru and, seen from the air, resembles a devastated battlefield: full of deep craters, amputated tree trunks, and blue plastic tents sheltering thousands of hopeful gold miners from the poorest parts of Peru.

The illegal extraction of gold has been stimulated by high prices—as much as 1,200 dollars an ounce—and has provoked an ecological disaster over the last decade. The soil of the rain forest has been eroded and the Amazonian rivers polluted by the mercury used to separate the gold from dross.

Since the end of 2012, the Peruvian government has been trying to check the advance of the deforestation of La Pampa and of water and soil pollution. A series of interdicciones have been carried out: massive police operations by land and air aimed at expelling the miners, destroying their camps, and dynamiting the machinery they use.

But the state strategy to protect its natural resources is limited, running into the social drama of the miners themselves, whose activities are simply a last resort to escape poverty. Although there are no official figures, given the informal nature of the activity itself, the Peruvian authorities estimate that some 20,000 miners, including women and children, are working in La Pampa.

One of these anonymous workers explains the difficult situation: “We know we are wreaking havoc on the rain forest, but what can we do? The government gives us no options. We are willing to reforest, if they ask us to. Mining is a refuge for all of us.”

“All of us” includes more than the miners, who have to endure the noise of the motors for as long as twenty-eight hours straight in order to extract a few grams of gold from the muddy pools. Also congregated around this illegal business are countless cooks, mechanics, drivers, ironmongers, and other informal workers required by the settlements of miners. “I make a living from the motors: I’m a mechanic. And if the government comes and destroys them, what will my family and I do for a living?” asks Leoncio Condori, fifty-one years old, who came to live in La Pampa six years ago in order to improve his economic circumstances.



4



5

4. In this May 4th, 2014 photo, a miner holds an amalgam of mercury and gold which he mined after working a 28-hour shift at an illegal gold mining operation in La Pampa in Peru's Madre de Dios region. Thousands of artisanal gold miners sweat through long shifts and, for a few grams of gold, endure the perils of collapsing earth, limb-crushing machinery, and the toxic mercury used to bind gold flakes.

5. After transporting the engines from the surface to the crater—some of them almost sixteen meters deep—miners called *maraqueros* prepare a device called a *chupadera* before starting to look for gold in La Pampa, in the Madre de Dios region of Peru, on Monday, May 5th, 2014.

7. (next spread): Manuel Espinosa holds his son Edward, four months old, while taking a break from mining in La Pampa, in Peru's Madre de Dios region, on Friday, May 2nd, 2014. Soldiers, police, and marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in Peru's southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios. The authorities began enforcing a ban on illegal mining Monday in the Huepetube district. Before the deadline, miners clashed with police, intermittently blocking traffic on the Intercoastal Highway that links the Pacific with Brazil.

6. The miners are called *maraqueros* because they work with a device called a *maraca*, used to remove large stones and pieces of tree trunks in La Pampa in Peru's Madre de Dios region, Saturday, May 3rd, 2014.











8. This aerial view from a police helicopter shows the effects of illegal mining in a deforested area known as La Pampa in the Madre de Dios region of Peru, Wednesday, February 24th, 2016. On the right is a tolba, a makeshift sluice-like contraption layered with pieces of carpet to capture the gold deposits from water sediment.



9. *Policemen protect themselves from the dust churned up by a helicopter during an operation to eradicate illegal mining in the area known as La Pampa, in Peru's Madre de Dios region, Wednesday, February 24th, 2016.*



10. *In this Nov. 12th, 2014 photo, a column of policemen walk amidst a destroyed illegal mining camp during an anti-illegal-mining operation in La Pampa, in Peru's Madre de Dios region. Some 1,200 soldiers, police and marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in the southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios. The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP20 or CMP10) will be held in Lima, Peru, from December 1st to 12th, 2014.*



11. *Flames and plumes of black smoke rise over a destroyed illegal gold mining camp after the authorities set fire to motorcycles and gasoline used by the miners, as part of an operation to eradicate illegal mining in the area known as La Pampa, in Peru's Madre de Dios region, on Wednesday, February 24th, 2016.*



12. *In this photo taken on Wednesday, April 30th, 2014, gasoline used for illegal mining still burns after being destroyed by authorities in the Huepetube district in Peru's Madre de Dios region on Monday, April 28th. Soldiers, police, and marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in Peru's southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios. The authorities began enforcing a ban on illegal mining Monday in the Huepetube district. Before the deadline, miners clashed with police, intermittently blocking traffic on the Inter-oceanic Highway that links the Pacific with Brazil.*





13. *A mother carries her daughter at the mining camp where they live in the Huepetube district of the Madre de Dios region in Peru, on Monday, April 28th, 2014. Some 1,500 soldiers, police, and marines have begun destroying illegal gold mining machinery in the southeastern jungle region of Madre de Dios.*



14. *A soaked miner, covered with mud, works inside a crater in search of gold in La Pampa in the Madre de Dios region of Peru, on Sunday, May 4th, 2014.*

ALEJANDRA SÁNCHEZ INZUNZA

Instructions for Breathing in Mexico City

“ In order to make Mexico City a more livable place, many experts agree that the city model has to change.”

WHEN ROXANA MALVAEZ began to run and try to lead a healthier life, she didn't think about the air. When her head ached during her jogs through Chapultepec Park, the biggest park in Mexico City, she didn't think about the air. When she first felt her nose bleeding in the middle of the track, she didn't think about the air. When she had to pause the rock music she was listening to on her smartphone because she couldn't go more than a kilometer without coughing fits, she didn't think about the air. When she ended up at the doctor's office with a patch over her eye, she didn't think about the air. But the air had to do with it all.

We breathe 21,000 times a day in order to survive, but we never think the air can harm us. We choose what to eat, where to live, who to go out with, but not what to breathe, and in Mexico City the air is only good eight days out of ten. When running in the open air, Roxana Malvaez confronted a mixture of pollutants—ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and lead—which in highly concentrated doses can cause anything from rhinitis to pulmonary emphysema. When the nosebleeds, the dry throats, and the headaches became more severe, Roxana, twenty-eight years, who worked in the field of international relations, when to the doctor, because she thought she had some sickness that had manifested itself as a result of her running. “The doctor told me I had to stop running outside. It wasn't me, it was the air!” said Roxana, who hates exercising on the treadmill in the gym. The particulate matter—better known as PM 10 and PM 2.5, in reference to its size—was remaining in her nose, causing scabs and nosebleeds. It also affected the coughing, the headaches, and the feeling of fatigue. A few months before, an imperceptible, microscopic particle had gotten into her eye, where it remained on her contact lens and scratched her retina. For two weeks she had to wear an eyepatch and couldn't go running.

For more than thirty years, Mexico City has been one of the most polluted metropolises in the world, and the label has given rise to countless rumors. An article that appeared in the Mexican newspaper *El Tiempo* on 20 July 1982 claimed that breathing the air in the city was equivalent to smoking forty cigarettes a day, that taxi and bus drivers all suffered from conjunctivitis because of the pollution, that traffic jams lasted more than three hours, with eight thousand cars in lines twelve kilometers long, and that the pollution had reduced visibility in the airport from five to three miles. Such urban legends are believable in a city with more cars than Madrid has inhabitants and where, a few decades ago, there was an oil refinery, leaded gasoline was the norm, and air quality was never measured. In the midst of this decomposition of their air, the *chilangos*, as the inhabitants of Mexico City are known, have learned to breathe without a face mask and not to think about what they are carrying around in their lungs.

But 2016 has been an unbreathable year. After fourteen years without an “environmental contingency”—when pollution levels are so high that emergency measures, such as restricting vehicle use and discouraging open-air activities, are taken—the capital city has had nine of them in just the first half of the year, and its residents have begun to think about the ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter lodged in their noses and lungs, about the benzene in their livers and kidneys, and about the lead and carbon monoxide incrusting in their hearts and brains.

No one voluntarily drinks a glass of dirty water or eats a rotten apple, but it is impossible not to breathe in the dirt in the air. According to the Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad, air pollution in Mexico City in 2015 caused at least 1,800 deaths, 4,500 hospitalizations, and 248,000 visits to the doctor.

“No death certificate will read ‘died of pollution,’ but it is a fact that bad air quality affects our health and causes thousands of premature deaths a year,” explains Dr. Horacio Riojas, director of environmental health at the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública (National Public Health Institute), which recorded 9,638 pollution-related deaths in the metropolitan area last year. Although they do not know it, the residents of Mexico City and surrounding areas are required to survive the air they breathe.

The most polluted cities in the world—Beijing, Shanghai, Hanoi, Dubai, Lima, New Delhi—are full of people who spend their savings on air purifiers or drink beer in bars where they are paying for clean air. If the idea of

people going shopping with an oxygen tank seems to belong to some future shock scenario, certain athletes, and others of the rich and famous, already sleep in air bubbles to enhance their quality of life and survive the ambient pollution. A few years ago some Dutch entrepreneurs designed the Aegis Parka, a jacket made of the most resistant fabric in the world and equipped with a respirator that activates whenever the sensor registers a certain level of airborne pollutants. Technology is helping us to deal with polluted air.

In Mexico City the air determines what the residents of the city can do. A lawyer gives up the house of his dreams in order to be able to breathe. Doctors search for a cure for asthma by analyzing the most polluted air of the capital city. A mechanic pays no attention to the fact that his lungs could be as contaminated as those of a smoker. A teacher has to cope with a group of children upset because they can't play outside. A systems engineer studies French while stuck in traffic. A poet gathers up birds that have died of lead poisoning. Millions of drivers get hysterical about the *Hoy No Circula* no-drive days and a group of cyclists pretend to die of a coughing fit caused by the pollution.

In order to survive the air quality of Mexico City, Roxana Malvaez asked for a change of schedule at her job in a chamber of commerce in order to be able to exercise before work. "I was frightened when I found out about the particles getting lodged in my lungs, but I don't want to stop running outside," she says. Three times a week she returns to Chapultepec Park to run in the morning—against doctor's orders—because at that hour there are fewer emissions in the air. She never goes out without checking the air quality first. In order to train for her first marathon, she bought a face mask, which she doesn't always wear, and a humidifier. When she gets home, Roxana Malvaez breathes in a good dose of pure air to make up for all the hours she has been breathing the polluted air outside.



In order for a capital city of twenty million people to keep functioning, some 52,000 trucks with 30,000 tons of food are required. Every night, while Mexico City sleeps, thousands of trucks exhale clouds of black smoke as they arrive at the biggest market in the world, the Central de Abastos. The vehicles park in a space that would fit seven hundred soccer stadiums and the retailers unload meat, fruit, fish, chickens, vegetables, and liters of bottled water (for the largest consumer of bottled water in the world). All

through the early morning hours, pineapples and watermelons are piled up three meters high and signs reading “What a deal!” or “Look at these prices!” are stuck into tomatoes and potatoes. All through the day, half a million people are breathing in the aisles of the market without thinking about the fact that they are in one of the most polluted zones of the city, which produces 10% of its trash and where thousands and millions of diesel particles—a fuel that pollutes twenty times as much as gasoline—are floating in the air. Narciso Hernández, a traffic policeman who inhales the smoke of the trucks in the Central for twenty-four hours in a row, impatiently awaits the end of his shift in order to return to his home in Chalco in Estado de México. “I always think about going home to detoxify,” he says.

The Nueva Rosita neighborhood, just next to the Central de Abastos, is a residential zone where the neighbors close off the streets to celebrate fiestas and where trucks find parking spaces. There is one ironbound environmental rule: where there are more motor vehicles, there are more pollutants. The emission counts of the metropolitan area indicate that 60% of the pollution comes from private cars, between 15% and 20% from trucks, and the rest from industry and homes. In addition to making space for dozens of trucks and trailers. Nueva Rosita, located in the Iztapalapa district in the east of the city, is surrounded by three important urban thoroughfares. Many doctors, environmentalists, and air quality specialists have chosen the neighborhoods around the Central de Abastos to study the effects of pollution, especially the abundance of ozone and PM, on people’s health. Car exhausts emit nitrogen oxide which, reacting with oxygen, forms ozone, the culprit of watery eyes, raspy throats, and almost seven hundred visits to the doctor a day for respiratory infections. Nitrogen oxide is also a precursor of the particulate matter that can cause cancer or chronic respiratory ailments. Although the residents of Nueva Rosita are more exposed to these pollutants than people anywhere else, they seem to be immune to them. “Ignorance is bliss,” explains Dr. Patricia Segura, head of the research department of the Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias (National Institute of Respiratory Diseases). “If you don’t measure it, then you don’t know it’s in the air, and you can live your entire life without realizing the harm the pollutants are doing you,” she adds.

Mario López, a thirty-year-old mechanic, has repaired truck motors since he was thirteen years old. “All my life I have breathed in smoke and nothing has ever happened to me. It would be worse if I smoked,” he says

with a laugh that reveals two spaces between his teeth. López, the third generation in a line of mechanics, does not notice when the quality of the air deteriorates, or that it is going from bad to worse in the zone. According to Dr. Horacio Riojas, exposure to pollution can reduce a person's lifespan by anywhere from six months to two years. For his thesis, the doctor monitored thirty-five heart attack patients for two years to determine how much harm air quality can do to someone with cardiovascular problems. The subjects were connected to sensors for particles and carbon monoxide and a device that monitored their heartbeats throughout the day. "If they went near a busy thoroughfare, their heartbeats sped up. If they were surrounded by trees, they were better," comments Riojas, a small man with a thick salt-and-pepper beard.

Year ago, his colleagues Drs. Albino Barraza and Leticia Hernández worked with people living near the Central de Abastos and other polluted zones in the east and south of the city in order to determine how much it was affecting them. In 2002, they undertook a study of 183 asthmatic and healthy children between the ages of six and twelve who were exposed to diesel fuel because they lived in areas with heavy truck traffic. For five years, the subjects went to the Children's Hospital every two weeks to have their lungs tested and the levels of inflammation in their respiratory passages measured. "In every case there was a diminishment of pulmonary functions. The effect was more severe in the asthmatic children, but that does not mean the healthy ones were not affected as well," explains Barraza.

In 2006 they conducted another study to establish the relation between asthma, obesity, and pollution. The methodology and the results were similar. "The patients who were more exposed to pollutants registered diminished pulmonary functions and increased variability of cholesterol, triglycerides, LDL, and HDL. These alterations also have to do with cardiovascular damage. It is impossible to know whether in forty years they will be at risk of a heart attack, but if these biomarkers tend to vary they can be more susceptible," explains Hernández, who adds that, whenever there is an environmental contingency, his daughter gets sick.

Around 34% of the population of Mexico City has some kind of allergy and 11% is asthmatic. A contingency is declared when the ozone level goes above 180 points on the IMECA, the air quality index. This means that children, old people, and asthmatics should not go outside or do exercise.

Schools suspend open-air activities. An environmental contingency means a life with the windows closed.

When the bell rings for recess, the children of the Víctor María Flores primary school in the Juárez neighborhood in central Mexico City remain at their desks if there is a contingency. Professor Aaron Jurado instructs them not leave the classroom, as if they were in an emergency situation. The air in the city becomes a sort of monster that keeps twenty-two third-grade children from going out to play. The outside world is a danger and the children have to eat their lunch at the same desk where they were studying math a few minutes before. "It's difficult, because the school's infrastructure is not of the best. There is insufficient ventilation and being in such a confined space causes a certain discomfort. The children are angry, bored, restless," says Jurado, who began this year to explain to his pupils that the air could do them harm. During the "ozone season"—from March to June—respiratory ailments increase drastically in the school. If a child arrives sick, he or she is sent home in order not to infect the others, though this is practically unavoidable. "They get sick more and more often. We are more vulnerable to all the stuff we breathe in constantly, and that has been more noticeable in recent years," says the teacher, who has been working at the primary school for almost two twenty years.

The health risks vary, depending on the type of pollutant. Gases tend to pass into all the cells of the body and be diffused. Ozone, for example, is a very reactive element. When it enters our bodies it turns into oxygen again, but it leave a free radical that is very dangerous, because it is looking to join up again, breaking links and oxidizing everything in its path, such as metals. "Ozone does not kill, but it dazes. Other things follow in after it," explains Patricia Segura.

The doctor often experiments with guinea pigs to gauge the damage polluted air can cause to the body. She injects them with egg white, to which they are allergic, in order to render them asthmatic. "They are completely healthy, but within three weeks they begin to get sick," says the doctor. The guinea pigs are exposed to levels of PM pollution above 100 points, which is bad air quality, more or less what the inhabitants of Mexico City breathe all year round. The PM is measured by the size of its molecules. If they measure more than 10 microns (PM₁₀) they adhere to the mucus and do not enter the body. But the smaller the molecules are, the more hazardous they are. PM_{2.5} and other finer particulate matter (measuring less than a micron) can

enter the alveoli and the bloodstream. The particles are so small that they can reach the brain and be lethal. When the animals are in contact with the PM, they begin to cough, their respiratory passages close up, and they secrete mucus. Their lungs turn completely black. “We subject them to an environmental contingency. Within three weeks we see that the increase in inflammation of their respiratory passages and their asthmatic crises become very severe,” adds Segura. A while later, the guinea pigs die.



One day in the winter of 1987, the poet Homero Aridjis got a telephone call announcing a piece of apocalyptic news: birds were falling from the sky. Birds had become his obsession the day he tried to kill some with a shotgun and almost ended up killing himself. His experience with death at the age of ten awakened a lifelong interest in birds and the environment, as though they were two sides of the same coin. “I understood that my survival was linked to theirs,” says Aridjis long afterwards in the living room of his home. That winter day he would see it again: birds were falling to the ground though no bullets were being fired. The air in Mexico City was killing them.

The writer hung up the telephone and rushed to the Alameda Central to gather up the corpses, which would become the banner of his struggle against pollution in the capital city. “They were victims of the poisoned air we are also breathing,” recalls Aridjis, founder of the Group of 100, a commission of prominent artists and intellectuals—Juan Rulfo, Leonora Carrington, Octavio Paz, Rufino Tamayo, and others—who were looking to change environmental policies. Their battle began one day in February 1985, when the writer Ramón Xirau was on his way to the university to give a class, but the air was so grey and toxic that he asked the taxi driver to take him to the offices of the newspaper *unomásuno* so that he could publish an open letter of protest against the conditions of pollution in the city. When he read the letter, Aridjis, a man with slightly slanted eyes and an aquiline nose, decided he had to do something, so he called Xirau and, a month later, the entire country was talking about the need to breathe cleaner air. “It was suffocating: solid pollution. You felt like you were going to drop dead on the street,” insists Aridjis about those days.

The Group of 100 achieved the first environmental changes in a city that had never before associated the grey, cloudy air with pollutants. The efforts of the activists forced the shutdown of the Azcapotzalco refinery, cre-

ated the first air quality monitoring system, closed down open-air garbage dumps, got the lead out of the gasoline, and had no-drive days and vehicle verification centers established. “We wanted to protect the inhabitants of the city from the slow death to which the corruption and neglect of many, many years was condemning them,” explains the poet, who has never driven a car and gets around on the subway. With the Group of 100, Mexico City began to breathe easier.

Like the caged birds that miners take underground to test the ventilation, birds above ground are also the first victims of bad air. Since the 1990s, no more of them have died from the pollution. Though it may not be noticeable, the air quality is much better now than when members of the Group of 100 were having their photos taken with Salma Hayek and Pierce Brosnan. In 1992, the IMECA reached 492 points. Now it never tops 200. The Mexican norm, however, remains below that of the World Health Organization, which recommends declaring an environmental contingency when 150 points are registered. “The environmental pollution we have today is far less than in former years, though the contingencies that have been declared have disguise that fact,” points out Dr. Francisco Barnés, executive director of the Centro Mario Molina, a nonprofit organization founded by the Mexican Nobel Prize winner, which seeks to constitute a bridge between science and public environmental policy.

From 1992 to 2010, average ozone concentrations went down by 33%, but over the last five years there has been a reverse in environmental policy. In March 2016, when the first contingency was declared, everyone was asking what was going on. People took photos of taco stands and black exhaust fumes pouring from buses to denounce those supposedly responsible for the pollution. Mothers pleaded with their children to wear their face masks to protect themselves from whatever the wind was carrying. The city was on alert. On social networks, animal lovers were giving advice about how to keep dogs from being exposed to the pollution. Smokers were viewed with more suspicion than ever. Cyclists boasted about how they didn’t pollute and vegans were proud of reducing Co2 emissions by not eating cows. The Mexico City government established a double *Hoy No Circula* to reduce the number of cars on the road and offered free public transport, but no one understood why the city was coming out of one contingency only to head into another.

“There was a conjuncture of two factors,” explains environmental activist Marta Delgado. “The air quality norm was lowered 30 points all at once

“ Like the caged birds that miners take underground to test the ventilation, birds above ground are also the first victims of bad air. Since the 1990s, no more of them have died from the pollution.”

in 2014, so now a contingency is detonated by a lower level of pollutants. And in 2015 the number of cars increased drastically. It all snowballed.”

When Delgado was Secretary of the Environment (2006-2012) in the Mexico City government, the program of no-drive days was stiffened to control the number of cars on the road. Vehicles manufactured before 2008 received the 2 hologram, which meant they had to stay off the road one day a week and one Saturday every month. “The verification centers are corrupt and vehicles from before 2008 do not have electronic fuel injection, three-way catalytic convertors, and other technologies, so they cannot receive a zero hologram. Why even give the verification center the chance to be corrupt? We decided not to,” says Delgado. A study by the Centro Mario Molina in 2015 indicated that 45% of the vehicles circulating daily and 80% of those with the 2 hologram surpassed the permitted limit of emissions, but had obtained their sticker through “corrupt practices and obvious failures in the verification system.” A car that does not pass verification can pollute up to twenty times as much as one that does.

In 2014, when the air quality norm was lowered, the Mexico City government decided that *Hoy No Circula* would also be extended to every Saturday.

This generated a resistance from the population, both within the capital city and in the greater metropolitan area. At least 2,000 people sought court injunctions against the measure, which they considered discriminatory. The issue snowballed. In the face of the wave of people seeking injunctions, the government decided to revoke the measure for vehicles from before 2008 and, since then, they have all been able to be verified. “This new measure meant that around 750,000 vehicles were added to the total in 2015. There are experts who say the actual figure is closer to one million,” explains Gabriela Niño, public policy coordinator at the Mexican Center for Environmental Law. On days when there is a lot of pollution, Gabriela’s head aches.



While sitting in Mexico City traffic, Carlos Monsiváis listened to all nine of Beethoven’s symphonies. Since the turn of the new century, when four million drivers were consuming eighteen million liters of gasoline and five million liters of diesel fuel and pouring out 2,400,000 tons of pollutants a year, the Mexican writer began to think that his real free time was when he was stalled in traffic, a situation which should be seen as an “institution of patience.” In his essays he proposed that the most congested arteries, such

as the city's peripheral ring road, should be equipped with confessionals, stands selling books and cassettes, and units offering special attention to people with nervous conditions. "Another proposal (and it doesn't seem like a bad idea) is monthly enrollment in courses on art history, Mexican history, and world history. The Periférico would be the ideal place for that. Everyone has time to spare and, if microcomputers were installed in every car, drivers could chat with one another," he comments ironically, referring to a city with more cars than public bathrooms.

Some of Monsiváis's prophecies have been fulfilled, though not exactly as he foresaw. María Pulido, a graphic designer, thirty-five years old, has sent off as many as 133 WhatsApps during the fifty minutes it takes her, "when there is not that much traffic," to get from her home in the Condesa neighborhood to her office in the west of the city. "I didn't realize I was chatting so much, but at least I don't get bored that way," she says. Whenever he is on the road, Martín Rodríguez studies French with a smartphone application. That way he makes the most of his time and escapes the boredom of being stuck in traffic. "If I could even learn to play the piano..." comments this systems engineer who spends at least fifteen hours a week in his car or on public transport.

In 2012, the Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad (IMCO) conducted a study of air quality by examining the costs of pollution beyond health issues. "There were cities, such as those in China, which avoided investment and caused their populations to become ill. We wanted to prevent this in Mexico," says Gabriela Alarcón, responsible for urban development at the IMCO. When people were asked what the ten main issues were that concerned them in their city, the first two were always employment and the quality of public transport, the second of which is deficient in Mexico City. Around 75% of the population of the capital city use public transport and 65% consider it to be very bad or bad. On average, people spend two hours and forty-two minutes a day on getting around. Dimitre Kronic, a Serbian who works as a community manager in a company in the center of Mexico City, spends four times as much on Uber in order to avoid the crowds on the subway. A transfer at the Taxqueña station in the south of the city can take as much as an hour. "The only thing I hate about this city is the transport. I'm in a bad mood all day," says Dimitre. The annual cost of poor mobility in the metropolitan zone has been estimated by the IMCO to be over 33 billion pesos (around 1.76 billion US dollars), enough to build twelve Metrobús lines.

Ever since he was in high school, Agustín Martínez, a tall, square-shouldered man with a moustache, has preferred a bicycle to get around on, avoiding traffic and not contributing to air pollution. Now he presides over Bicitecas, a network of cyclists which in 2012 began to collaborate with other civil society organizations on air pollution issues. By means of a national campaign entitled *Hazla de tos* (an expression with a play on words about coughing which can also be loosely translated ‘Make it Your Problem’), they tried to show the damage done by cars to the environment and sought to raise awareness of what it means to breathe in a big city. They took part in talks with the government, made a music video, and took to the streets. They demonstrated in the midst of traffic, wearing fumigation masks. They assembled flash mobs, where one person began to cough and passed it on to everyone in the place, until they all “dropped dead” from the polluted air. “It was a strong image of what was going to happen,” says Martínez, who inhales the exhaust from cars whenever he rides around Tlalpan on his bicycle.

In order to make Mexico City a more livable place, many experts agree that the city model has to change. This means discouraging the use of cars, ensuring quality public transport, and encouraging the use of bicycles. To move toward a less polluted city, Francisco Barnés of the Centro Mario Molina recommends increasing the price of automobiles (as has been done in Tokyo and Singapore), regulating truck traffic, combatting corruption in the verification centers, and reducing the average vehicle age from the current level of twelve years. Agustín García of the Atmospheric Sciences Center at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México believes it is also indispensable to meet the goals of the Proaire program for the period 2011-2010, which seeks to lower the norm for declaring an environmental contingency to 150 points, among other measures. “You can live without eating for a month, last a few days without water, but without breathing you can’t survive more than a few minutes,” points out this chemical engineer who decided to study air quality issues when he saw that few people were interested in devoting their efforts and attention to this free resource. If the city doesn’t change, its inhabitants are condemned to breathing bad air.

The first contingency of 2016 was detonated by conditions in the south of the city, near the Estadio Azteca, where soccer players have been complaining for years about air pollution. The Atmospheric Monitoring Center of the Pedregal district—there are forty-five of these centers across the

metropolitan are—detected the first contingency in fourteen years on March 14th. In the Jardines del Pedregal neighborhood, where streets are named after elements and meteorological phenomena such as Fire, Lighting, and Clouds, there is no street named Air.

For years, Saúl Aranda had been looking for the ideal place to live with his family and one day he saw a classified ad in the newspaper. The house had two floors, four bedrooms and four bathrooms, a Jacuzzi, an enormous kitchen where his wife could prepare her famous lasagna, a recreation room with a bar where he could watch soccer with his friends, and a large yard for his dog Socrates. It was near his office and his son's school, and only a twenty-minute drive to his parents' house. There were friendly neighbors and plenty of parking space and he was in the zone he liked, just a few blocks from a shopping center he enjoyed going to on weekends. Since it was in Jardines del Pedregal, a wealthy neighborhood in the south of the city, it was little more than he wanted to pay, but it was a place where he would want to grow old. All his needs were met in those 450 square meters. But among all the things he was looking for, Saúl Aranda never thought of the air.

The Arandas lasted for only two years in the house of their dreams. They had unwittingly moved to one of the most polluted zones in the city, where there is poor air quality almost year round because of the accumulation of ozone. Cases of the flu and coughs became more common among members of the family. Saúl's seven-year-old son Sebastián came down with a severe cough that closed up his throat, the result of croup, a viral respiratory infection, ending up in the hospital on more than one occasion. When Saúl's wife got pregnant again they decided to move. "We had to go to a place where the children could breathe without getting sick," says Saúl. The family moved to Cuernavaca in the state of Morelos, forty minutes from Mexico City, where the weather is good almost all year round and where, four years ago, when they made the change, pollution levels were lower than in Mexico City. The house has a swimming pool now, though it is smaller. Every day the children play in the yard. Saúl Aranda is thinking of starting to run in order to take advantage of all the free air and to live a healthier life. But an airborne curse is pursuing the Aranda family. The city of eternal springtime, as it is called, is becoming one of the most polluted in the country, alongside Mexicali and Monterrey. "We haven't noticed it yet," jokes Saúl. "I hope we don't have to move again."

OSCAR B. CASTILLO

Our War... Our Pain



1. Caracas, Venezuela. A student in a mask made from a bullet-riddled Venezuelan flag, protesting in southeastern Caracas against the Maduro government and high rates of inflation and violence.





2. *Caracas, Venezuela. Family members and residents of San Agustín in downtown Caracas watch a funeral procession passing in the street.*



3. Caracas, Venezuela. Juan Carlos Palacios, 24 years old, is carried by a young neighbor who is paid by the family for his help. For Juan Carlos it is a daily challenge to find his way out of the long labyrinth of stairways that make up his neighborhood.



4. La Guaira, Vargas, Venezuela. At a government workshop about violence and crime on the outskirts of Caracas, a young boy draws scenes of everyday violence in his community. The average age of entry into gang life is going down, and there are more and more cases involving boys of twelve or thirteen years of age. The government has organized disarmament workshops aimed at involving members of the community in the fight against illegal firearms and violence.



5. Caracas, Venezuela. Hip-hop singer Splinter visits gang members at their hideout to record a music video. In these circumstances, any “average” young man can get caught up in the growing wave of street violence, as he spends his life surrounded by it.



6. Caracas, Venezuela. An elderly man screams and shouts out against corruption in food distribution at a protest against scarcity and food shortages in Catia, a stronghold of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro supporters.



7. *Caracas, Venezuela. An opposition supporter at a cacerolazo (pan-beating protest) protesting against the results of the presidential election won by Nicolás Maduro.*

8. *Caracas, Venezuela. While funeral tributes to Chávez were being held on one side of the city, on the other side an elegant wedding was taking place. Eighteen-year-old whisky and the very best imported food and drink were on the table.*

9. *Caracas, Venezuela. Gang members and younger residents often squat in abandoned houses and bang around the debris-filled lots of their neighborhoods. Some slums have been completely destroyed by heavy rains, forcing residents to seek shelter in other neighborhoods or refugee camps while waiting for the government to assign them a rent-controlled house.*









10. *A young man poses for a picture, showing his arm tattooed with a machine gun. The growing wave of violence is reflected in many aspects of daily life, with young people more and more associated with violent behavior, whether as victims or victimizers.*

OUR WAR...OUR PAIN

The Causes and Consequences of Violence in Venezuela.

Our war... our war is not only made of blood and fire: it is an endless battle against ourselves, it is our apathy prevailing over our hard work. Our war is the hard but easy way, the way of "shoot first, ask later." Our war is a proof of our inability to have a dialogue while coexisting with our differences. Our pain... our pain is not only physical: something is hurting somewhere else. The bullet pierced the flesh and lodged in the collective soul and, embedded as it is, it has become impossible to remove.

Our war should not have that name of WAR. In our war there are no sides, there are no clearly defined camps in confrontation against the enemy. This is an all-against-all fight. It is not an armed conflict, even if there are millions of weapons ready to be fired. It is not a drug war, even if tons of drugs come in and out every year from our ports and our brains. Here we haven't had a coup d'état, but many people want to bring down a government that tried, at one time, to bring down another government. We are not in the midst of a famine, but people are unable to find basic foodstuffs, though they can get 18-year-old whisky. Our war is criminal, political, economic, social, moral, spiritual... Even some of the saints we pray to have guns at their hips and are constantly asking for rum and coke to keep having fun in the afterlife.

Our pain has been highly selfish, while the carnage has taken place only in the slums, among the poor, among "those" people from "there." Nobody raised their voices about it. One person's pain did not feel other people's pain. Maybe there was no such thing as OUR, until the cycle of violence entrapped us all and made us at once victims and victimizers.

The work presented here is a selection that aims to reflect our experiences as a society dealing with violence manifested at all levels of our daily lives. Rather than an account of violent events, my work aims to put together the links of the chain, by giving a before and an after to the violent event itself. My main interest is in the images of causes and consequences, which may help us better to understand how we arrived at what seems today to be a point of no return.

Through this project I am seeking to give a human face to those red numbers. This situation is true, and sometimes so evident that there is no need to consult any figures to realize that the plague is actually devouring the lives of Venezuelan society and its young people. But while the government hides and distorts the real crime rates not giving any official data since 2005, and while the opposition

11. *Caracas, Venezuela. Opponents of the government demonstrate in Caracas, demanding a definitive date for the revocation referendum. The vote on revocation is provided for in the constitution, but it has been difficult to carry out, as the government delays by various measures, such as not scheduling it for a specific date.*





takes advantage of this, using Venezuelans' pain as a political tool, tragedy is in the air, and it is impossible to hide.

Behind those alarming figures there are thousands of destroyed families: children without parents and parents without children, thousands of survivors with scarred bodies and scarred souls. Citizens of all ages, social classes, and political affiliations who carry years of pain and suffering on their shoulders, but still refuse to surrender in the face of adversity. I know how they feel: I have felt that same distress firsthand. This is why, as a photographer, I don't want these stories to fall through the cracks, but to be remembered through images that speak to both public opinion and the general population—to both leaders and citizens—and that make them understand the importance of taking immediate action and responsibility for the reconstruction of our current situation.

www.eltestigo.net



12. *A view of street vendors in the Sabana Grande area of Caracas, with some Christmas decorations in the background. The informal economy has been growing over time. Although the government has tried to give these workers a legal framework, many of them are still employed outside of the real economy, neither declaring their income nor paying taxes, and therefore remaining ineligible for social security.*



15. *A boy plays in a sporting area, beside stagnant water left from recent rains. Communities have extensively worked structures to adapt them to their needs, but lack of materials and skills generate results not always in accord with health and safety requirements.*

PATRICIA NIETO

The Orchard Keepers of Medellín

“ In the 1990s more than 100,000 people arrived in Medellín from places where the guerilla, the police and army, and the self-defense leagues were confronting one another in a ferment stirred up by the drug cartels.”

I

ROSALBA ECHAVARRÍA stops swinging her machete when she perceives a fluttering of wings. For a few second she remains motionless, alert, with her arm raised, holding the little sword with its one-sided blade. She examines the green, pitted body of the citron in search of some threat. There are no climbers or creepers in sight: just a group of silvery butterflies trying to fasten their tongues to some bright red flowers, unconcerned by the bustle of the newcomers. The woman drops the tool she has been using to check the advance of the vines across a tiled overhang and quietly approaches the orchids bearing the onslaught of the flying insects.

Near the flower, Rosalba is no longer the hardened grandmother clearing away shrub, digging trenches, and making beans grow where there are only stones. In the face of the butterflies, she is all serenity and silence. She smiles as if the arrival of the newcomers were the sign of her triumph: if butterflies come, it's because there's nectar in the orchard. After a few moments of ecstasy, Rosalba suspends the task of cleaning up her orchard and gives herself up to the pleasure of observing the little plot of land where five years before not even weeds would take root.

She walks between the furrows with the confidence of someone who knows the paths as if they were the hallways of her own house. "There are ten beds of crops and I have conjured them out of nothing," she says, without raising her eyes. Eyes, hands, nose, and palate are the tools used to identify and control. She looks at the stains, upside and downside, touches the thorns on the stems, smells the blossoms, bites the leaves. She comments out loud to herself: "Lemon balm, for the blood; parsley, the moths are eating it up; chili peppers, I don't like them and I won't take them; cabbage, it's getting too high; no orange blossoms for days; lettuce, there's still some for seed; native potatoes, delicious with spinach; fragrant basil;

cherry tomatoes, just sprouted; chamomile, to wash newborns in, whether infants or cats.”

She suspends her litany and remains silent for several moments. Rosalba lingers over the chamomile and checks the roots to see if the stagnant waters are harming it. She rubs the soil between her fingers and declares it mud. She avoids some stones, rests her feet on the root of an avocado tree, and boosts herself up. Up in the tree, she holds onto the young trunk to survey the extension of the planet she has just explored.

In the treetop, Rosalba looks less diminutive and whiter than when she is down working amidst the shrubs. At age seventy, she knows that her forty-square-meter orchard is more than earth moved around with her hands in place of shovels, hoes, and rakes; she knows the orchard is her last place on earth and she clings to it as thirty-nine other women cling to their plots of land on a hill called the Sugarloaf, a rock formation of oceanic origin that projects from the eastern rises of Medellín, rising 2,138 meters and offering its face, like a giant on the defensive, to the ceaseless blows of the wind, rain, and sun.

If she looks into the distance, Rosalba can see the river running through the city. But she prefers not to do so, she says. The river that was once a silvery line when seen from above is now a brown stain that reflects neither the sunlight nor the moonlight. And the four million people moving around in the Valle de Aburrá intimidate her. So she gazes at something nearer: the Pinares de Oriente neighborhood, from which in 2008 a contingent of women emerged in search of land to cultivate.

II

Pinares de Oriente is a group of houses huddled together on the lower part of the hillside. Rosalba points out the paths that communicate the 170 houses built at different levels, according to the whims of the topography. Some of the properties are walled in with stones and cement to protect them from the water, tree trunks, and rocks that sometimes come tumbling down the slope; others are wooden or brick houses with colorful balconies; and some stand out by the glinting of their sheet metal roofs. Thirty years ago, this was the eroded face of the mountain: a rocky surface disguised by reddish soil where not even a fern would take root. It was there that five

families arrived, survivors of a mudslide that buried five hundred people on September 27th, 1987 in Villatina, the neighborhood to which Pinares de Oriente forms an appendix.

This handful of escapees were joined, in the following years, by hundreds of others fleeing war zones. With the terror of having seen the unspeakable branded on their faces and with no more possessions than the clothes on their backs, they piled into the ramshackle houses of old acquaintances, from which they were removed by urbanizing pirates who offered them the promise of a plastic roof farther up the mountainside. In the 1990s more than 100,000 people arrived in Medellín from places where the guerilla, the police and army, and the self-defense leagues were confronting one another in a ferment stirred up by the drug cartels. More and more campesinos kept arriving when the paramilitary groups took over large territories in the early 2000s, bringing the total number of displaced people from all over Colombia to more than six million in a period of thirty years.

It was wounded, suffering, uprooted people who occupied the Sugarloaf, paying inflated prices for the lots or having them assigned by Julio Perdomo, a paramilitary leader who, in his capacity as a recently demobilized combatant, established himself in a wooden house and set about imposing order. “If I’m able to control a block, that block will live in peace; if I can control a neighborhood, that neighborhood will live in peace,” explained Perdomo to a German television reporter in 2004, a year after laying down his arms as a member of the paramilitary Cacique Nutibara Bloc and months after taking possession of the base of the hillside in the company of a group of trusted associates with whom, in plain sight of the rest of society, he would devoted himself to raising pigs and chickens through the Cooperativa Omega.

“We women arrived into that world: we were like the dead of another war but we wanted to live,” says Rosalba. “And they all lent us or sold us land and shovels and plastic to shelter our children,” she continues, without taking her eyes off the women weeding the tomato plots, cutting onions, harvesting cabbages, and bathing children in the nearby orchards. “They are all in mourning for someone,” she insists. And all of them, she says, have left some of their skin on the rocks of the fields they cultivate and have left their blood on the roads in confronting the police who destroy their houses and corrals in order to occupy public land. And all of these women (they have told her in whispers) have broken down in tears when the gangs expel

**“ I found out that
we all had husbands
or brothers or sons
who had been victims
of massacres or forced
disappearances.”**

one of them from her home. The armed leaders covet the 104 hectares of the hillside; they want the crowning height from where the whole city can be seen; and they seek to control the rocky salients which, like lighthouses, allow them to observe the paths that communicate the eighteen official neighborhoods with the eighteen in a state of gestation, the currents of water that supply hundreds of houses, and even the insides of houses where thousands of children—and potential soldiers—are growing up.

Isela Quintero was the first to raise her voice when she saw twenty women struggling to salvage tiles and stoves when their houses were torn down. “I felt that tragedy was everyone’s,” she confides, as she turns over the pages of a school scribbler. It has been weeks since Isela, the mother of three daughters, sowed a seed; she has been writing. She looks at Rosalba’s orchard through the mesh, pulls up a handful of mint leaves, smells them, bites them, runs her tongue over them, and then says she is not willing to leave the story of her sufferings untold.

“She was the one who woke us all up,” admits Rosalba. After watching that eviction, pursing her lips and gritting her teeth, Isela could find no peace. She began to tell everyone that such a thing could not happen again. “I realized that we had all lost our original properties,” says Isela, interrupting her reminiscences to look down into the valley, where the city spreads out, staining her father’s fields like a well-watered woodland where she was happy until the age of seven. “I found out that we all had husbands or brothers or sons who had been victims of massacres or forced disappearances.” She cuts off her phrase to invoke her murdered husband. “So I invited the women to talk about it, but all we did that day was hug each other. That’s all we did,” she repeats, as if to emphasize that only after weeping together could they talk.

Isela’s voice uncovered the strength of fragility. A little blond woman, thirty-two years old, she let herself be carried away by her memories, woven of scattered scraps, and spoke of rape and persecution, of murder and theft, of torture and extortion, of fear and flight, all part of her story. She also confessed that she was tired of wandering and that, as Rosalba had also decided, the Sugarloaf would be her final home. When she said her daughters would grow up there, the storyline became firm and led the women of Pinares de Oriente to believe that they would get lighting from an indifferent Medellín, that they would draw honey from the immense rock on which they rested, that apples might sprout in the pine wood, that

from their suffering hearts would come words to say they were alive. And it is that life, in Isela's words, "that must be sown in a city hostile to campesinos brutally driven from their land."

III

On the first day in this newly-created world, the women of Pinares de Oriente denounced the abuses of the local authorities; on the second, they created a committee responsible for establishing contact with the government, for which Pinares de Oriente did not even exist; on the third, they declared themselves an (unofficial) communal action council and appointed religious authorities; on the fourth, they brought drinking water, through a clandestine aqueduct, to their showers, which were no more than hoses; on the fifth, they turned on their lamps with electricity obtained legally; on the sixth, they established schools for their children; and on the seventh day, when they were ready to rest, they asked themselves if they were going to continue eating the leftovers they begged for in plazas and restaurants, if they were going to continue feeding their children rotten papaya, sour milk, blackened lettuce, stale bread, and rice teeming with worms.

Isela received an answer one Sunday in 2008 as she was observing the rising contour of the hill. "Look," she said to herself, "if these are fields and if I'm a campesino woman, what am I doing here with my arms folded, knowing that there are children around eating newspaper soaked in water?" Silvia Rueda and Gloria Ocampo joined her in the new venture. They explored the hillside, chose a very green piece of land near Pinares de Oriente and staked their claim to it. Within a few weeks there were several more women with them, with their children and grandchildren, willing to occupy just a few square meters of the 13,000 hectares surrounding Medellín like a green fringe. But Isela, recalling a previous atrocity, stopped their advance and convinced the others not to turn over a single piece of earth before obtaining the permission of the local government.

The horror had taken place higher up the mountain. Rosalba listens to Isela tell the story in her slow, gentle voice and covers her face with the palms of her hands to conceal her eyes swelling with tears. Twelve families, driven by hunger, decided to occupy a lot a year before Isela began thinking of her communal orchards. Every morning, women and men went

up the hill equipped with hoes, shovels, machetes, axes, picks, rakes, and pitchforks. First they planted orange and mandarins, then onions, potatoes, yucca, carrots, lettuce, and tomatoes, to see if it were possible to draw bread from a stone. The efforts invested in revitalizing the rocky, acidic soil laid the groundwork for more life: 19,300 coffee plants, 7,000 yucca clusters, 200 fruit trees and a henhouse with 600 hens, according to the inventory of a group of university professors interested in urban agriculture. It was a family-based neighborhood project that could be expected to provide both food and money.

The news of an imminent harvest in an orchard on the upper part of the hillside reached the ears of the gang leaders who seemed to control even how the children breathed in their own homes. They sent observers and messengers, who transmitted their orders: for every kilo of produce sold, the *boss* had to receive a percentage. The tentacles of the criminal economy extended even to where the poorest were trying to wrest a little food from the earth. The farming families promised themselves they would go ahead, in spite of the threat: they would not pay the “vaccinations” and would simply avoid confrontation. Even after the murder of three young people, the families continued their enterprise, driven by a will to survive, without realizing that their silent, laborious resistance was becoming an even greater provocation. Months later, when the eldest of the campesinos was murdered, the twelve families abandoned the orchard, their tools, their homes, and the hillside.

The women of Pinares de Oriente reconstructed this account as if it were a movie in which they themselves were the characters. Following the silence caused by fear, they tried to summarize what they had learned. “We want to plant because we know how to do it and we are hungry” was the first idea, as Isela recalls. “We have never wielded a weapon and we are not going to do so,” they agreed. “We can use our voices, so that the city knows we exist,” they concluded. So they decided to restrain the impulse to work the land and fill it with seeds that would produce food in a short time. Instead, they decided to turn their efforts, energy, and words to an even more arid terrain than that of the Sugarloaf: politics.

The decision animated the discussions on the Committee of Displaced Persons of Comuna 8, to which Isela was sent as a representative. When the issue of lack of food in Pinares de Oriente was brought up, she discovered that she and her neighbors were not the only ones with empty stomachs.

When she heard it said that 35.7% of the population of Medellín was malnourished at times, she was reminded of the kitchens in her own neighborhood, where water was boiled to cook only onions and salt.

So she asked for more information. And she found out that 71% of the people in her *comuna* did not get enough to eat. And concluded that, in Pinares de Oriente, a little settlement that wasn't even included in the municipal statistics, since it was located outside of the urban boundaries, the proportion of hungry people could be as high as 90%. These figures were like a golden thread which Isela followed in order to justify the need for an orchard in Pinares de Oriente and to preach that the green belt surrounding the city should be transformed into a great plantation with crops and native trees.

IV

Rosalba seems to be hearing the story of odyssey that led to having an orchard for the first time. Perched in her young tree, she considers the 64,000 square meters that the local government gave them in loan six years ago. She points out the boundary stones and then each one of the forty orchards, demarcated by meshed partitions, behind which the orchard keepers, the *huerteras*, move like bees in a hive. Isela recites their last names at random, without thinking who is the eldest or who has the greenest thumb. With each name, her racing memory calls a thousand thoughts to mind, which is why she pauses when her own story comes up again. "Lema, Henao, Ceballos, Echavarría, Areiza, Torres, Ramírez, Atehortúa, Rueda, Valencia, Sucerquia, Vásquez, Parra, Quintero... that's me," says Isela, interrupting the roll call. She watches a cloud of white butterflies fluttering around among the cabbages, as if to keep away the memory of four men pointing their rifles at her at the turn of a road in her childhood. "They're beautiful," she says, "but they eat up the leaves before you know it."

While Isela isolates herself behind a wall of silence, Rosalba comes down from her tower and resumes her inventory, touching, pulling, biting. "Tamarillo, for sweetening; aloe, for blisters; plantain, three clusters; cilantro, enough even to sell some; mangoes, with worms in them sometimes; breba, mother always had some at home; soursops, about to blossom; incense, reminds me of mass; citron..." Leaving her phrase unfinished, Rosalba ap-

“ Rosalba seems to be hearing the story of odyssey that led to having an orchard for the first time.”

proaches quietly, raises her machete, and cuts off a fleshy, emerald-green sphere that falls at her feet. She picks it up and continues: "... the bread of the poor. Blessed be this citron." And she celebrates the harvest with her arms raised and a smile on her face.

In 2010 Rosalba was not celebrating. Since she was not yet a part of the family of the *huerteras*, she neither asked nor was asked what she was doing watching. She remembers how she saw the women scratching the rocks with their nails, trying to calculate the depth of the cultivatable soil. And much later, she was envious of the women passing by loaded down with bunches of onions or cabbages.

The one carrying the onions, Rosalba seems to remember, was Luz Parra. A woman of forty-five, defying the July heat in order not to miss the harvesting of the orchards. Rosalba greets her from a distance and she replies with a phrase carried away by the wind before bending over a bed of purple lettuce again. Later, when the sun no longer dazzles her eyes and the dirt has been cleaned from her fingernails, she states her vocation: "I grew up with my uncle in the hills. I worked in the fields, never in the kitchen." One day, she would be weeding the yucca field; on another, she would be clearing out the bean patch, before going through the coffee fields, marking the plants that had been touched by coffee rust; and on weekends she helped to extract the sucrose from the sugarcane.

The Parras lived in fields that Luz remembers as flat and green, with crystalline waters running down a small hillside. Some men settled up there who were "different from the campesinos," she explains. They had weapons, uniforms, tinned food, and told their adventures, inviting the children to learn to live as they did. But one afternoon the charm was broken. Luz walked into a lean-to without permission and what she saw horrified her. She ran as fast as her legs could carry her and spread the news that she had seen someone who had been kidnapped. From then on, the guerrilla fighters called her *Minguerra*, as if to say that she was working for the Ministry of Defense, and to suggest she keep her mouth shut.

A few months later a paramilitary group arrived and occupied the hillside. They were given two hours to leave paradise after someone murdered her oldest uncle and Compañero, the family dog. More than thirty people, all descended from the same grandfather, hacked their way through the jungle with machetes in order not to cross paths with the Army and add another enemy to their list.

“There was no more family,” laments Luz. Everyone took his or her own path. The one she chose left her at the foot of a pine wood and facing a man who decided who to give land to. “They called him *El Barbado*, though he only had a moustache, or *El Viejo*, even though he was young,” says Luz and recalls how, when she appeared before him with her two children, he didn’t even look at her or listen to her. “The orchard?” says Luz. “It was a little piece of yellow land.” When she received it, on April 16th, 2012, she thought she was up to the task. She had been born and raised in the fields and had also trained with professors at the National University to sow in jars, in water, and in cushions. But she didn’t know that conquering that hillside plot had a price. For months, she carried cow and horse manure from a neighboring corral, mixed it with plantain leaves and potato peels she found lying around, and scattered it slowly over forty square meters. “What food is that going to provide?” they shouted at her as they watched her work. Now she can reply to them: lettuce, cilantro, cabbages, cucumbers, citrons, zucchini, onions, eggplant, and cucumbers.

Rosalba remembers that the cabbage was brought by Berta Vásquez, an older grandmother as skilled with her body as with words. She had been a walker since the soldiers removed her from the *corregimiento* of Juan José de Montelíbano twenty-five years ago, where she used to grow rice, plantain, and yucca. She has explored the Sugarloaf, where she has lived for ten years, from top to bottom. She also wanders the unpaved and gravel paths of the hillside, asking at each orchard if they have anything to sell or barter. Sometimes she comes back loaded down with cabbage from Golondrinas, tomatoes from Rayito de Sol, cilantro from El Faro, onions from El Pacífico, or lemons from 13 de Noviembre.

Before going home, Berta smokes a cigarette in the Casa Vivero with Rosalba and Luz, waiting for someone to buy her merchandise, which includes cookies and pickles. Until recently, no one came near the wooden cabin that looked like a campesino’s hut. According to press reports, for seven years Julio Perdomo—*El Barbado* or *El Viejo*—used it as a headquarters for one of the criminal organizations formed by demobilized paramilitaries. In the building, now a classroom for the *huerteras*, lived more than ten men engaged in taking care of the pigs, feeding the chickens, extorting the merchants, distributing marijuana, trafficking in vacant lots, training dozens of gunmen a week (on a lot now occupied by the *huerteras*), and torturing and murdering whoever happened to infringe the laws imposed by

Perdomo. In 2010, when Perdomo pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit criminal acts, kidnapping, forced displacement, extortion, and murder, witnesses in the case denounced the disappearance of thirty bodies into the crevices of the hillside and testified about the “paintball” field, where target practice was carried out with flesh-and-blood targets.

Now the children play in the patio, some women are learning how to process food, and Berta shares her various skills. “I have gotten many ideas, such as this one of harvesting from other people,” she says, explaining that if someone asks her for ten heads of lettuce she is capable of going to the other side of the hill to get them. “I invented a special chimichurri with different kinds of onion,” she adds, pausing to blow out a mouthful of smoke. White, purple, and green onion, scallions, Medellín onions, yellow onions, peppers, and a combination of herbs which she doesn’t reveal, because that’s the secret ingredient. “I have discovered many virtues in the plants and I offer that service,” she says softly, adding that hibiscus is good for the kidneys, cilantro for insomnia, arugula blended with carrot stalks and beetroot for losing weight, and basil for the heart.

Rosalba is no longer looking at the *huerteras* from a distance. When she, her eleven children, and her twenty-five grandchildren had already forgotten the smoothness of the native avocado, the crystal caress of aloe, the tingling of the tongue when grazed with a chili, the profuse salivation provoked by the brebas cooking in syrup, Isela gave her an orchard another woman had abandoned. Rosalba entered barefoot into her new world. She swept clean the surface to examine the lines made by the former owner, planned what she was going to sow, and got down to work. As she touched the soil with her hands her life seemed to recover its original meaning, giving her an uncontainable joy that made her weep. While she was pulling out weeds she recalled her life in Ochalí, a wild, green hill country, and for a few moments she evoked her life as a campesino girl, pulling worms out of the bean patch or checking the size of a hen’s next egg.

It grew suddenly dark and rain threatened, but Rosalba did not want to interrupt this moment. The land on the Sugarloaf was rough, but it was land, like what she had had to abandon on Monday, January 17th, 2000. The images poured over her like a cascade, without any temporal or grammatical order, forming a slow tale of horror. At the beginning of that week, one hundred and fifty paramilitaries murdered sixteen people in four villages of the municipality of Yarumal. Then they went through La Quiebra, El

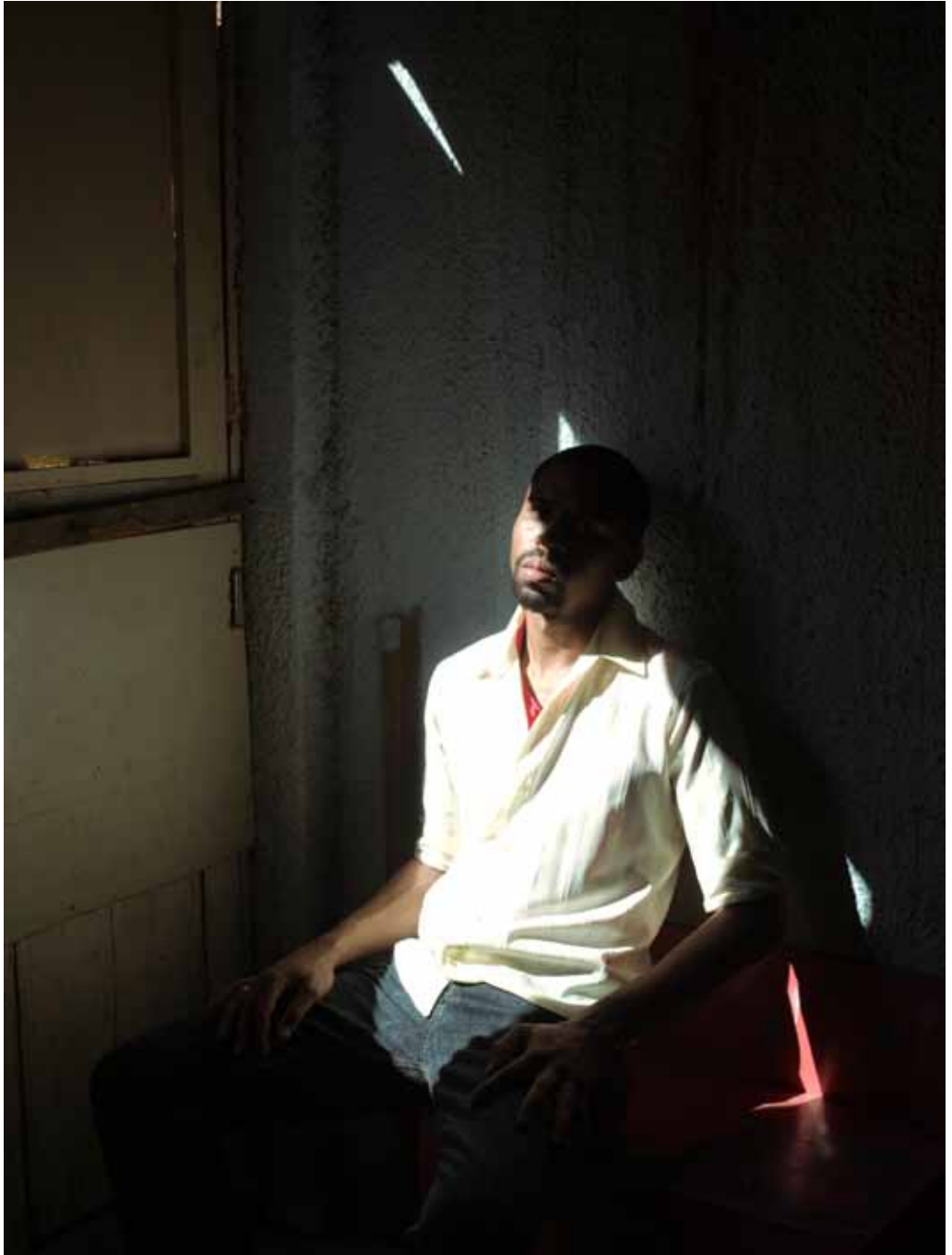
Llano, La Rivera, and Ochalí. They murdered nine men, all relatives of Rosalba's. That same week a hundred and twenty people took to the roads. Rosalba left behind all she had: a plot of land, three pigs, a mule, ten hens, and a seven-room house with a tiled roof. In Medellín, she received a plastic roof in 2000 and fourteen years later an orchard that connects her with her memories and challenges her every day to show how honey can sprout from a rock.

CRISTINA DE MIDDEL

Gentlemen's Club



1. Detail of the one of the towels available to clients in the rooms rented by the hour on the Praça Tiradentes in downtown Rio de Janeiro. The price of the room is six dollars for twenty minutes.



2. *Silvio, 28 years old. Security guard in a nightclub. Single. Goes to a prostitute three times a month and usually pays 180 reais (45 dollars) for forty minutes with two girls. Began to use the service when he was fourteen years old, out of curiosity and because he likes to be with women when he gets drunk.*



3. *Detail of one of the bed in the hotel where the photos were taken, near the Praça Tiradentes. The sheets are changed once a day, in spite of the use made of them.*

4. *Charles prefers not to reveal his age. He is a metalworker. The father of three children, he has never been married. He goes to a prostitute three times a month and usually pays 50 to 100 reais (14 to 17 dollars) per session. He began to go to prostitutes at the age of seventeen, when his father took him to a swingers' club. He continues to use them for something different and because the women have much more experience.*





5. Detail of one of the beds in a hotel located near the Praça Mauá, a place of encounter for prostitutes and clients in the zone. The price of the room is 15 dollars per “service.”

6. Daniel, 34 years old. Security guard. Married with eight children. Goes to prostitutes three times a week and usually doesn't pay, because they work in the same club. Began at the age of nineteen and continues because he like pleasure without any commitment.

7. Detail of a room in a hotel next to the Praça Mauá, near Porto do Rio.

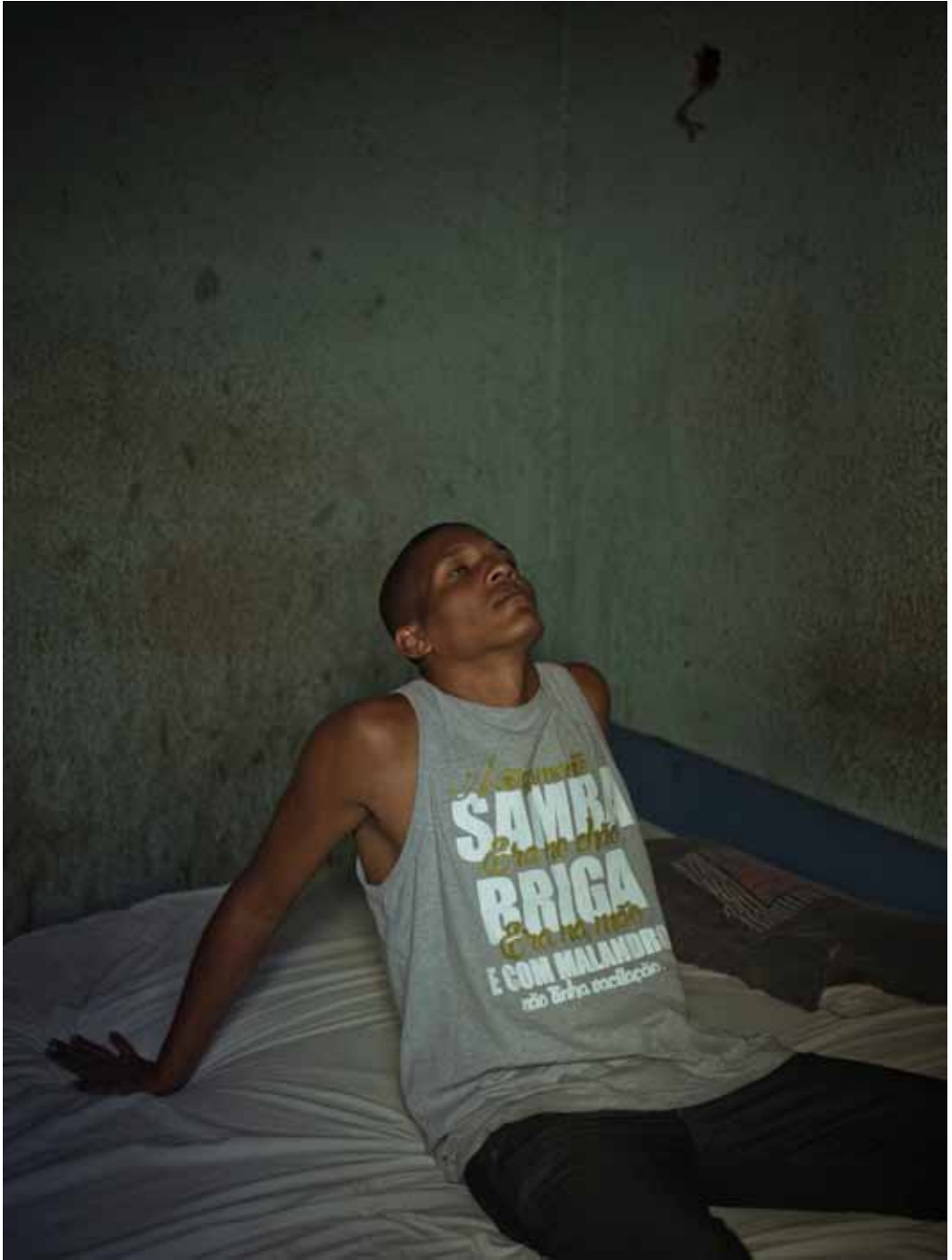




ALICE

E

JOÃO



8. *Felipe prefers not to reveal his age. He is self-employed. Single, with five children. He goes to a prostitute once a month and usually pays between 50 and 100 reais (14 to 28 dollars). Began to go at the age of nineteen and continues to do so for pleasure and fun.*

9. *Detail of a room in a hotel next to the Praça Mauá, near Porto do Rio.*





10



11

In portraying and explaining the business of prostitution, photojournalism has always focused on only one side of the transaction. If a group of Martians were to land on Earth and try to understand prostitution by only looking at the newspapers, they would come to the conclusion that it was a matter of women taking their clothes off in seedy rooms, nothing more.

This series of photographs seeks to put a face on the other side of the business, which remains silent and invisible: the clients.

In June 2015 I put ads in several newspapers in Rio de Janeiro, an almost iconic location in the world of sex tourism and reportages on prostitution. My initial rather ingenuous intention was to get to know and understand the kind of men who frequent the clubs where prostitutes can be found and, in a second stage, reverse the roles and get the men to cede their images and share their identities and experiences in exchange for money. A transaction not unlike the hiring of a prostitute.

The men who answered my ad would pose in order to give a face to the other side of the business, charging fifty euros for twenty minutes if they actually had to show their faces and twenty-five euros for the same amount of time if they remained anonymous.

To my surprise, the response was enthusiastic. Even today I continue to receive replies from men interested in participating.

All of the portraits were taken in two hotels in areas commonly frequented by prostitutes and their clients, a room being duly rented for each session.

www.lademiddel.com

10. *Detail of a bed in a room in a hotel next to the Praça Mauá, near Porto do Rio, a zone that has been revitalized by the construction of the Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow).*

11. *Italo, 35 years old. Construction worker. Married with six children. Goes to prostitutes two or three times a week and usually pays 150 reais (40 dollars). Sometimes he just treats them to a beer, if he manages to gain their trust. Began to go to prostitutes at the age of eighteen and continues to do so because he likes sex with no commitment.*

12. *Newton, 43 years old. DJ. Single and father of two children. Goes to a prostitute two or three times a week and usually pays 70 reais (18 dollars) per session. Began to use the service at the age of twenty-two and continues to do so because it harms no one, it's fun, there are no feelings involved, and it's a simple commercial transaction.*







13. *Detail of the one of the rooms in a hotel near the Praça Mauá.
The rooms tend to have some kind of romantic décor.*

CARLOS MARTÍNEZ

City of Numbers and Letters

“ El Salvador is a small country and its capital city—which would fit more than twenty times into the Federal District in Mexico—is in a valley at the foot of dormant volcano.”

IT WAS THE QUARTERFINALS OF THE 2010 WORLD CUP. Sebastián “El Loco” Abreu was facing Richard Kingson, the goalkeeper of Ghana, with the future of his country at his feet, about to take the penalty shot that would decide it all. He withdrew to the center of the penalty arc while the rest of team looked on in trepidation. He raced toward the ball like an arrow and the African goalkeeper, as saw him coming with his ostrich gallop, took his chances and dived to the right. El Loco was in time to stop himself and give the ball a harmless-looking chip right to the middle of the goal, where Richard Kingson had been sweating a half-second before. The team exploded, the bench exploded, the stadium exploded, and El Loco ran in celebration, kissing his jersey with the number 13 on the back. Uruguay had just gotten into the semifinals for the first time in forty years and he was the star, fleeing from his teammates’ embraces. The matador.

During his long career, Abreu played on twenty-one different teams in ten countries and three continents, and he always wore the number 13 on his back: his lucky number.

Six years have passed since that penalty shot and El Loco, at age forty, is a has-been. In the final throes of his career, with nothing better to do than get a few last dollars out of his legs, he ended up in one of the most feeble soccer leagues in the hemisphere, the Salvadoran league, where he signed with Santa Tecla FC. A team that occupies 748th place in the world ranking of soccer clubs, which is nothing to brag about. Even so, Abreu was presented as a celebrity and at the press conference the Salvadoran journalists rushed to ask him the question on everyone’s mind: whether he was really crazy enough to continue wearing number 13, which he had had on his back since 1995.

Abreu said that, although he had been warned about the “situation,” he would prefer to continue wearing the number of his life in soccer, that he did not wish to offend anyone, but that it was the number that had accompanied him his entire career.

The “situation” El Loco was talking about was that El Salvador is a violent country. The most violent in the western hemisphere. In 2015, one of every one thousand Salvadorans was murdered, and both the authorities and the general public agree that most of those murders were committed by gangs: the Mara Salvatrucha-13 and Barrio 18, mortal enemies. The “situation” is that the war between the two gangs is also waged by the greater part of Salvadorans: whoever lives in the territory of one gang is considered an enemy by the other, so it is necessary at all costs to avoid exhibiting any sign that could lead to misunderstandings. The “situation” is that the Salvadorans are afraid, they live in fear, they take the bus in fear, they work in fear, and they go home in fear. And with fear some things disappear, are censored, stop being said: in order to avoid mentioning the gangs, Salvadorans refer to the Mara Salvatrucha-13 as “The Letters” and Barrio 18 as “The Numbers.” The gang members themselves are forbidden to pronounce the name of the enemy, so for members of The Letters, 18 (*dieciocho*) is *dieciboyo* (‘ten hole’) and for the members of The Numbers, the Mara Salvatrucha is *mierda seca* (‘dry shit’). The “situation” is that, of the sixty-six teams in the three professional categories of Salvadoran soccer, only eight have players who wear number 13 or 18. The “situation” is that the principal of the school in the Santa Eduvigis neighborhood, controlled by Barrio 18, has had to admit that, on the school’s attendance lists the number 13 is always vacant, and when he asked one of the students if he could list him under that number, the youngster replied: “Expel me instead, teach.”

A few days after his presentation as the newest member of Santa Tecla FC, Sebastián Abreu announced that, for marketing reasons, he was changing his number to 22. The owners of the team were sure that no one would buy jerseys bearing the number 13, even if they were associated with the famous player.



El Salvador is a small country and its capital city—which would fit more than twenty times into the Federal District in Mexico—is in a valley at the foot of dormant volcano. The city’s greatest monument, its Eiffel Tower, its Statue of Liberty, is a Christ figure standing on a globe, which was originally sculpted to adorn the tomb of a president until, many years having gone by, it was given as a gift by the descendants of the deceased to adorn the entire country.

San Salvador fully deserves to be the country's capital city: it is the most populated urban area in the country—a little more than 300,000 inhabitants—and has double the national murder rate, it tops all lists for the worst traffic congestion in the world, it is halfway between a volcano and the sea, and of course there is also the fact that its symbol is... a gravestone.

But its being a capital city is just an illusion: in so small a country, knowing exactly which municipality you live in is simply a formality on your electricity bill. Municipalities are next-door neighbors and, in order to differentiate themselves, some of them have drawn the borderline on the street, with the name of each municipality on either side of the line, probably so that the garbage truck of one will not make the mistake of picking up a single bag of trash belonging to the other.

In order to designate this tangle, and to avoid the millimetric possibility of getting your neighborhood wrong, the term “the Metropolitan San Salvador Area” is widely used, and case closed. The fourteen municipalities are named at a single stroke: from the choicest urban real estate in the idyllic Santa Elena neighborhood, where the lawns of the US embassy stretch out, to the claustrophobic shacks of Montes de San Bartolo. The entire cast can be found within: the lucky ones living in mansions shaded by robust trees in neighborhoods whose names alone reflect their prestige (like Escalón); and the unfortunate inhabitants of atrocious cement slabs named with scornful disdain by urban planners with a twisted sense of humor (Prussian Forests, Swiss Alps, Venetian Meadows). But even these abysmal differences can be found huddling side by side in the Metropolitan Area: in the dark ravines of the Colonia Santa Elena you can find the same bustling anthills, or time bombs, depending on how you look at it.

The Zona Rosa, or Pink Zona, is the most famous tourist destination in the city, the site of the Princess Hotel, where visiting dignitaries stay, and of restaurants with exquisite international cuisine and discotheques with restricted entry. Sunken behind it, however, is the neighborhood of Las Palmas, from where the power of Barrio 18 irradiates.

Seated at one of the tables of a Denny's, sipping a fruit-flavored soft drink, a gang leader pointed to all the bars, discos, and restaurants and explained with seriousness: “All of these places, absolutely all of them, pay us, and they know they can't say anything.” Something that the owner of an Argentinian restaurant learned the hard way when he reported the extortion he was the victim of to the police: two kids on a motorcycle drove

by and emptied the magazine of a pistol over the lunchtime terrace. “The owner was being two-faced,” explains the gang leader. “On the one hand he was paying us, but at the same time he reported it to the police.” No one died that day, but a Nigerian took away some lead in his body as a souvenir and the restaurant closed down that same afternoon.

The cramped nature of the Metropolitan Area, which renders official divisions irrelevant, makes it a matter of life and death to know the real nomenclature, which doesn’t give a damn about little maps with their administrative borders: the geographical organization of The Letters and The Numbers, who control every inch of the capital city. Sometimes the control is explicit, as in Valle de las Flores, where the gang installed an enormous door in the only entrance to the neighborhood and gave the keys to one of its members, who justified the act by explaining that “we have to make sure the police don’t get in.” At other times the control is invisible, and usually subtle... until you’re a Nigerian eating a cut of beef and a stranger fires at you from a passing motorcycle without saying heads up.

If you are a campaigning politician and you want to enter one of these marginal communities to kiss babies and give away buttons with your picture on them, you need a middleman who can consult with the gang in question to see if it’s possible or if anything needs to be given in return. In April 2016, in a communiqué signed jointly by the “national spokespeople” of the Mara Salvatrucha-13 and Barrio 18, the gangs said they felt “defrauded” by the governing party: “The leaders of the FMLN have defrauded us... promoting our destruction by military means. Our communities will therefore never again be playing fields where the FMLN looks for votes and grass roots support... We have given instructions to our territories not to allow partisan political activities or the use of party symbols such as flags, T-shirts, caps, etc.”

If you are a multinational like the English-South African SABMiller, the second-largest brewer in the world and the owner of the Coca-Cola brand in El Salvador, you will pay dearly for georeferenced map to plan out your distribution routes. Not a map marked with useless administrative districts, but one with the sign of each neighborhood, whether Letters or Numbers. In that way you can prevent your delivery trucks from taking mixed routes in enemy neighborhoods and your drivers from appearing in the news behind the yellow tape of a crime scene.

If you are the mayor of a municipality in the Metropolitan Area, like

“ (...) the geographical organization of The Letters and The Numbers, who control every inch of the capital city.”

Ilopango, for example, you will find yourself having to invite the two enemy gangs to dialogue, in order to keep the number of homicides in your municipality from skyrocketing. There, in the meeting room of the municipal council, the local leader of Barrio 18 was complaining to his counterpart from the Mara Salvatrucha-13 that some of his members were trespassing the limits and that this was going to end up bringing the guns out. In order to avoid confusion, and as a gesture of goodwill, they agreed to designate a certain capulin cherry tree as marking the borderline and, to make things perfectly clear, they decided that a “civilian” would come and mark the border on the street in green spray paint.

Beside the tree, which produces an aromatic red berry, there is now in Ilopango a line painted with spray paint, like the ones the mayors have painted in order not to make any mistake. That is the real border, the one that has to be respected. On one side of the line are The Numbers, while on the other side The Letters rule.

¶

Alfredo was a good student. A skinny guy with big dark eyes and a rhythmic way of speaking who liked to be a bit mysterious about his age. He would have been about twenty years old and he had worked his way up to being the leader of the local cell of the Mara Salvatrucha-13. Alfredo was the complete opposite of the stereotypical gang member: he had no tattoos and, rather than baggy *cholo* trousers, he wore tightfitting skinny jeans and had a cajoling, almost affected tone when speaking, drawing out his words so that they would sound softer. I met him in the parking lot of the municipal building in Ilopango, where the mayor had invited me to witness his attempt to negotiate with the two main gangs.

When I got off my motorcycle I felt someone behind me pressing something against my ribs and whispering: “Don’t move and give me the keys to the motorcycle.” I obeyed. Alfredo then let out a big laugh and removed his fingers from my side. “Nooooo, newspaperman, it’s a joke.” And he held out his hand with a little boy’s smile. He told me he had seen me in the mayor’s offices and that the mayor had informed them that I would be at the meeting. “Were you scared, newspaperman? Don’t be afraid: it was just a joke.” And I took his hand without knowing whether to laugh at his fun. We smoked a cigarette talking about motorcycles and Alfredo explained to me that the joke I had been a victim of was a replica of the art of stealing cars,

which consisted basically of waiting until the unsuspecting motorist had gotten out of his car, asking an accomplice to act as a lookout, showing the *client* a pistol and putting him *tikaman*, which in plain English means making him put his hands up. He also told me that one day something had gone wrong and the police chased after them, but, being so clever, he took apart the pistol as he was getting away in the stolen car and threw the pieces out the window. So they could only charge him with car theft and not with illegal possession of firearms. He had been in prison for a while and got out to enjoy his new ex-con stripes. Ever since that day, Alfredo always answered my calls and it's possible he even called me a few times. I saw him again the day I visited the public school in Las Cañas.

Las Cañas is a neighborhood divided in two by a four-lane avenue. Most of the residents live on one side, which is controlled by Barrio 18. On the other side there are far fewer people and it is controlled by the Mara Salvatrucha-13. The only public school in the neighborhood is also on that side. The teachers at the school saw a dramatic reduction in attendance: some courses went from three sections with forty-five students each to a single section with fifteen students. Teachers had been reassigned because of lack of students and all this had happened from one year to the next, after the Mara Salvatrucha-13 prohibited anyone from the other side of the avenue. The Letters had made their authority felt, decreeing that any student or parent who crossed those four lanes was an enemy spy and would have to face the consequences, which is to say, a beating or a rain of bullets. So the school began to empty out. I went through the facilities with the teachers and took note of the deserted classrooms and half-filled attendance lists. None of the teachers offered to accompany me out, and as soon as I set foot outside the school, the doorman slammed the door at my back and left me standing there facing the gentlemen of The Letters.

Five gang members and a dog were waiting for me, doing their best—the dog as well—to show me their most frightening faces, and I realized the foolish thing I had done: I had taken for granted that visiting the school in that community required only the permission of the teachers, and now here was the Mara Salvatrucha-13 to remind me of my mistake. A fat guy was holding a thick chain in his hands and another was holding back the dog by the neck. Then, to my luck, and as I was stammering out something, Alfredo recognized me. He was no longer the same amiable young fellow. He looked at me with hatred, or with something very much resembling

it, approached me in silence, and when he got close, began to tell me off without his gentle tone. Now he was spitting out the words like a hammer. “Newspaperman, don’t do this to me again. My telephone hasn’t stopped ringing, and since you’re hanging around and they don’t know you here, they were ready... If you’re going to come, call me first... Just imagine if I weren’t here.” And I haven’t stopped imagining it since.

Alfredo was a student at that school. He was in the seventh grade, taking classes at night with students much younger than him. He was a hard-working student and his teachers gradually discovered that that skinny young man held authority over the rest of the students, and then they discovered that he held it over them as well.

“If you wanted to scold a pupil, he would threaten you by saying his father or his brother belonged to the gang. And what could you do?” recalls a teacher named Eleazar. So they went to Alfredo and the next day the kid had lost his spirit and ended up apologizing to the teacher. If some of the homeboys of the gang were hanging around the school selling drugs, the teachers talked to Alfredo, and the next day there was no trace of the drug pushers. So when the teachers had an idea about how to recover their lost students, it was natural to get the authorization of the *lawmaker* of The Letters.

Of course the teachers aren’t stupid and they never sought to modify the rules of nature: those four lands that divide Las Cañas are written in stone and asking the border to disappear was—and is—ridiculous. So they put their hopes on something lesser: what if Alfredo would let them *cross* the avenue? That way they could raise money among themselves and the parents and rent a house in the other section of Las Cañas and set up a sort of branch of the school. Alfredo gave authorization for the teachers to cross the street and venture into the other territory. Now came the other part: convincing Carlos, the *lawmaker* of The Numbers, to allow them to enter their territories.

Carlos was a few years older than Alfredo, very quiet, and you never saw him laugh. He had three tattoos on his forehead that made him look violent and gave him a severe gaze under his slightly slanted eyes. I always thought that, by having worked so hard to put on that grim look, Carlos had no other one to show. Carlos listened to the teachers and made no objection to the idea.

Probably without knowing what they had achieved, the teachers of the school in Las Cañas had just built a bridge over an abyss. A simple rope

“If you wanted to scold a pupil, he would threaten you by saying his father or his brother belonged to the gang.”

bridge, if you will, one that swayed to the will of two young men who had never finished high school, but a bridge nevertheless.

The house was very expensive. Thirty-five dollars to rent a single floor in a neighborhood like Las Cañas—full of informal workers, *maquiladora* employees, workers paying bribes to get a minimum wage of around two hundred dollars a month—is something to think about. Thirty-five dollars, depending on where they are placed, can mean an enormous number of different things: it can be half of a drunken night out or a dinner, or a book or a taxi to the airport, or some cheap shoes or a tank of gas for a midsized car, or a school: an ugly, cruel school that is also, depending on how you look at it, the best possible school in the neighborhood of Las Cañas.

There were ninety students enrolled in a sitting. Mostly high school level, but also adult literacy, and junior high... The money was obtained immediately. There was so much demand that it was necessary to talk to a political party to see if they would lend their offices at night and then to invade the premises of the social services building as well.

The school itself was in fact a squat shack, half finished, which at night was a hotbed of fathers learning to draw a letter and the mystery of the sound the drawing called up, of young men who—following a hard day's work—had enough willpower to sit at a child's desk and fill up notebooks. In other words, that shack would fill up at night with people who—foolishly enough, perhaps—sat down together to have hope.

The teachers had no other option but to divide themselves up to deal with the ruckus they had created: the one who used to teach natural sciences now had to do social sciences, and maybe English as well. Every day the teachers made the trip from the school to the little shack, passing through a fire without getting burned.

When a group of gang members took to hanging around the school to try to flirt with the girls when they were leaving class, Eleazar talked with Carlos and they never showed up again. Three gang members from Barrio 18 managed to get a high school degree and many of their children learned their ABCs.

Two years after the experiment began, the school was still going strong: the rent was now sixty enormous dollars, which is usually enough to pay for two floors. The war between the two sides of the avenue is also still going strong, and the distance across those four lanes is no shorter than ever. There are still families separated by the division, who meet together

surreptitiously in some distant place in order to talk to each other and hug without danger. But the little school is still going strong.

Carlos was murdered by his own gang. He took a hundred dollars of the gang's money to celebrate his birthday and party with some of his home-boys. He never managed to get together enough money to replace what he had stolen from Barrio 18 and his death was decreed from above. His own bodyguards killed him in the middle of a dusty soccer field. But the little school is still going strong.

Alfredo never got a high school degree. He was replaced as head of his cell, accused of being too soft. The last time Eleazar saw him, he was riding his motorcycle on the avenue dividing Las Cañas. Maybe he's still alive. But the little school is still going strong.

On the paperwork in the offices and the diplomas with their seals, the graduates of the two places so far from one another belong to the same institution: Las Cañas School. The teachers take the diplomas and cross the avenue to celebrate a second graduation ceremony. The new *lawmakers* on both sides are not as enthusiastic as their predecessors, but they continue to ensure safe conduct for the teachers... and the little school is still going strong.



And in spite of it all the city is still there: Christ is still standing on his globe, pointing his finger at the sky, and under his gaze the youngsters are trying to learn new tricks on their skateboards, trying again and again, getting up on the park benches, falling and getting up again. The bars play music, the cars get tied up in knots that unravel at night, and children go to school.

Eleazar was promoted from teacher to principal. Now he is at a school controlled completely by Barrio 18. "Expel me instead, teach," one of the teenagers said to Eleazar when he refused to take number 13 on the attendance list. And principal Eleazar knew he wasn't kidding. So the place remained vacant. And all the other number 13s also remained vacant: soccer teams rosters, late arrivals lists, class participation lists.

"So if that place can't be used, why keep the number, teach? Wouldn't it be easier just to jump from 12 to 14?"

"No, because if I do, I renounce the only symbol of authority left to me: that of keeping number 13 on my lists."

Although none of the students enters his name beside that obstinate

**“If you want to
enjoy life, look,
listen, and shut up.”**

number, Eleazar keeps printing it, like a child who stains a wall. Surreptitiously, the school principal has disguised his dignity with the number 13.

Perhaps the most common piece of graffiti in the city is one that reads: "If you want to enjoy life, look, listen, and shut up." Sometimes the word order is changed and it reads: "Look, listen, and shut up, if you want to enjoy life." Others don't give a damn about the exact words and just go straight to the point: "Look, listen, and shut up, or you're next." Sometimes the words are misspelled. But the idea is the same, repeated, hammered, on a neighboring wall, on the door of a school, and people live with that threat of death as though it weren't one. But it's an unwritten rule that no one touches a wall on which it has been written. Urinating at the foot of the graffiti will get you a beating, if you're lucky. And of course, no one in his right mind would dare to efface it, except on the days organized by the police to get rid of graffiti, when an agent with his face covered puts white paint on the sign, while others guard him with their rifles. But the next day, like a spreading weed, the graffiti is there again.

In revenge, some intrepid soul made a drawing on the Paseo General Escalón of a heart with some words inside it: "MS-13 and Barrio 18 love each other to death." It was rubbed out a while ago.

In the complex tangle of the Metropolitan San Salvador Area, sometimes it is necessary for a soccer player to change the number of his jersey, even though it has witnessed his past glories, or for a group of teachers to figure out a way, in a little shack besieged by gang members, to maintain the hopes of a handful of boys and girls and their parents. Some families have learned to get together far from the borders that separate them, and a school principal conceals his obstinacy behind a number. Two gangs use a capulin cherry tree as a border marker and now and then some mischievous person dares to speak of love between Numbers and Letters.



NICOLAS JANOWSKI

Adrift in Blue

Adrift in Blue*

(Tierra del Fuego, Argentina - Chile, 2014-2016)

*Just a small detail differentiates the “real” from the “magical”:
the angle from which life is viewed.*

H. C.

The island of Tierra del Fuego, the end of the world, has been traditionally understood as a physical and imagined space where *reality* is presented as a setting for spiritual forces. The thought associated with the place is transferred to the outer world and the images and contours of the island are projected by the senses of the mind throughout history.

The current setting of Tierra del Fuego is heterogeneous in terms of its origin, but it shares the same spirit of sacrifice and perseverance characteristic of its first inhabitants. A setting closely linked to the notions of isolation and renunciation.

And it is precisely in this sense that this historical imaginary presents Tierra del Fuego as a limit-place, the last frontier of civilization, anchored at the southern tip of inhabitable land: the end of the world is the place where hostility and adventure configure their most common representations. And even in an age of globalization, the metaphor of “world’s end” persists and projects its quota of mystery.

www.nicolasjanowski.net

* **Adrift:** A nautical word for anyone or anything that cannot be found or has come undone. Ships are adrift when they are moved about at the will of the wind and tide. ‘Adrift’ derives from Middle English *drifte*, meaning ‘to float.’





























JOSEPH ZÁRATE

The Petroleum Children

“ In 2007, during the World Energy Congress, it was announced that the earth still contains petroleum reserves sufficient for another century or two.”

THE FIRST SIGN OF THE DISASTER WAS THE SMELL. Acidic, penetrating, the rarified air swelled out from the banks of the river to the wooden shacks, like an invisible cloud of gasoline. The children playing on the riverbank were the first to shout the news. The current was descending like a viscous black stain that covered insects, fishes, canoes, tree roots, even yucca and plantain crops near the beach. The families of Nazareth, a community of two thousand inhabitants in the northern province of Bagua in the Amazon region of Peru, say that the night before a storm had broken out. The Chiriaco River had overflowed its banks. Except that this time it was carrying liters and liters of that substance known for being composed of the same material the dinosaurs were made of.

In Nazareth, some old Awajún people, members of the second largest ethnic group in the Peruvian rain forest, had known of petroleum from former times. But Osman Cuñachí—twelve years old, sixth grade, on the school archery team—had never seen or touched anything like it.

Osman recalls that on the afternoon of Wednesday, February 10th, 2016, two engineers from Petroperú, the largest state-owned company in the country, arrived in Nazareth in a 4x4 truck. A few weeks before, a fissure in the pipeline called the Oleoducto Norperuano, a steel serpent more than eight hundred kilometers long, famous for transporting crude from the jungle to the coast, had spilled two thousand barrels into a gorge near the Río Chiriaco. A landslide had bent the pipeline until it cracked. The company built a makeshift dam with tree trunks and plastic sheets to contain the fuel, but the rain caused it to overflow and spread it like a black plague several kilometers downstream. That afternoon the Petroperú engineers told the residents of Nazareth that they would be paid if they helped to clean up the petroleum. The payment would be generous. A bucket of crude would be worth five times the pay for a day's work in the fields: a hundred and fifty *soles* (around forty-seven dollars). They were not told who

could do it, nor were they warned that the substance was toxic or given special clothing.

When Osman Cuñachí and his brothers arrived at the site of the spill, his aunt and his cousins were already there. There were also pregnant mothers, grandmothers, and children, immersed in the water or perched in canoes, gathering up the crude with their bare hands. Osman recalls that the stench made him dizzy. His eyes were burning and his head ached. Roycer, his three-year-old brother, was the first to give up. Then Omar, seven years old, and Naidh, his fourteen-year-old sister. Osman decided to keep going until nightfall. The money he had been promised made him continue.

On his way home, while he was walking on the highway, a neighbor took a photograph of him that quickly spread on social media. Both the national and the international press commented on it with indignation in the days to come. In the image, Osman Cuñachí has black stains all over him: on his face, arms, and feet, and on his shorts and the red T-shirt with the word *Perú* in white letters across the front. The boy is carrying a bucket of crude oil. And smiling.



Those of us who live in cities tend to be indignant at news of ecological disasters. We know that spilling oil into a river can forever alter the lives of those living in valleys and woodlands hundreds of kilometers from a capital city. Nevertheless, it is also true that we tend not to question the central role the resources plays in our own lives.

No analysis of the wars for natural resources would be complete without a mention of the power of petroleum. Thanks to it, we have created, over the last half-century, a world in which people live an average of twenty years longer than before, in which we cross the oceans in half a day, in which people communicate instantaneously from everywhere on the planet for just a few cents, and where entire libraries can be carried around in a cellphone. Petroleum is used today to drive many of the processes that allow us to manufacture the things we consume. Of all the petroleum extracted around the globe every year, 84% is used to regulate the temperatures of our buildings and to keep our machines and vehicles running. The remaining 16% is used as a raw material in the manufacture of countless products: plastics, pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, crayons, ink, gum, dish-washing detergent, deodorant, ammonia, tires, foamed glass... Our whole

system depends on this underground substance that starts up the motor of modernity. Without it, it would be impossible to imagine cities as we currently know them.

The problem is that our dependence on fuel has grown to such scandalous dimensions that it is an increasingly frequent subject of debate among environmentalists and policymakers. Peru, the first country in Latin America to exploit petroleum commercially, is a good example. In 1924, when Venezuela became a petroleum producer, Peru was already the leader in the region. Yet today, while Venezuela produces three million barrels of crude a day, Peru manages barely 1% of that amount. The supply of accessible Peruvian petroleum—extracted from the Amazonian rain forest—is exhausted, but the population continues to grow and, along with it, and with worrying speed, the consumption of fuels. Peru is among the twenty countries “most addicted” to petroleum, according to the BP Statistical Review of World Energy. At the same time, it is one of the three countries most vulnerable to the effects of global warming and the use of fossil fuels.

In 2007, during the World Energy Congress, it was announced that the earth still contains petroleum reserves sufficient for another century or two. “The world need not be concerned for a long time about the end of petroleum,” declared at the time the president of Saudi Aramco, the biggest oil company in the world. It goes without saying that the multibillion petroleum industry is one of the largest polluters on the planet. Given these circumstances, scientists insist on warning us: if countries do not change their energy sources to others less destructive of the planet in the second half of the twenty-first century, it is very probable that both the planetary ecosystem and our economic system will end up collapsing. The reasons are not solely ecological and are determined by the force of circumstances: petroleum reserves will be exhausted and there is nothing we can do to avoid it.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), which monitors the world’s energy reserves, has predicted that by 2020 we will be consuming more petroleum than our technology allows us to extract. Once we reach this point, industrial production will plummet. In fact, it is possible we will hit a “tipping point” if demand surpasses supply and extraction becomes more expensive. If the hunger for oil in our cities remains steady, the world will need the equivalent of six Saudi Arabias to keep up with the expected increase in demand between now and 2030. Fatih Birol, executive director

of the IEA and an expert in energy issues, pleads: “We must abandon petroleum before it abandons us. And we need to prepare for that day.”

Osman Cuñachí, an Awajún, understands nothing about environmental policy and has never listened to Mr. Birol, but he knows how difficult it is to get petroleum off your skin when you have been stained by it. That evening, when he got home after having gathered up a bucket of crude oil, his parents scolded him for having gone out without permission. Osman and his brother and sister tried to get rid of the petroleum with soap, dishwashing detergent, and detergent for clothes. They scrubbed their bodies with rags, but no luck. Until their cousin, who had also worked cleaning up the spill, recommended they use gasoline. And that is what they did. The Cuñachí children could not sleep that night because of the itching all over their bodies. The next morning, the engineers from Petroperú arrived in Nazareth. Twenty or so residents of the village were waiting for them along the highway with their buckets of petroleum. In the end, and in spite of the people’s complaints, the engineers paid only a maximum of twenty *soles* (seven dollars) for each recipient. Osman remembers that the engineer only paid him two *soles* (sixty cents) for his bucket. The boy did not protest. He simply returned home, gave one coin to his mother and with the other went to the store to buy some animal crackers.

¶

Osman Cuñachí does not remember how many times he has told this story, nor how many journalists have asked him to show his stained clothing and the marks on his body in front of a camera. He would like to be known for his talent at stopping penalty shots and not as “the boy who gathered up petroleum.”

It is an overcast Sunday afternoon. Heavy rain is falling in Nazareth. Four months have gone by since the spill and Osman feels strange seeing a poster-size enlargement of the photo that made him famous hanging outside the community house of the village.

“You look ugly,” a friend tells him, and Osman covers his face with his hands, blushing with shame.

The poster announces a health campaign organized by the National Human Rights Coordinator to evaluate thirty children who reported getting sick after gathering up the petroleum. One by one they go into a tarpaulin enclosure in the house, where a doctor takes blood and urine samples and

cuts off a lock of hair, all to be analyzed by a laboratory in Quebec. Since it is past six o'clock in the evening, the house is in shadows. The power has gone out in Nazareth. A skinny little boy runs from under the tarp, terrified by the needles. His father shouts something at him in Awajún and runs after him. The doctor, with a prominent belly and bathed in perspiration, asks someone to give him some light from a cellphone so that he can continue his work.

Osman is not one of the children sitting in the waiting area, so he waits his turn playing soccer with his friends on the esplanade full of puddles. The Awajún say that the space is an old machine and pipeline graveyard, used to build the Oleoducto Norperuano in the late 1970s, one of the largest engineering projects ever undertaken in Peru. The military dictatorship of the time invested seventy million dollars and the labor of two thousand men into the project, which, according to economists and politicians, transformed Peru into a First World country. When it was finished, the us company in charge of construction decided to bury all the leftover material in the forest, which was cheaper than taking it with them. One day the gringos went home. A group of Awajún families came down from the hills to settle in an abandoned campsite, overrun by rats that were eating the snakes. They founded their first school there. Then came the highway, electricity, cable television, a medical post, and dozens more people attracted by the signs of progress.

Today Nazareth is a community of fishermen, farmers, and merchants who make their living along and from the Río Chiriaco. Right now, like any Awajún child, Osman Cuñachí would normally be fishing or bathing in the river, but he can't. Since the spill, the state environmental authorities have prohibited these activities, owing to the high levels of lead and cadmium in the water. The residents say these toxic metals come from the petroleum. Petroperú, which claims to have cleaned up all the crude along the banks of the locality, says that this is not true: that petroleum contains risible quantities of those elements. Germán Velázquez, who was the president of the company at that time, said they came from the sewage and refuse (plastic bottles, detergents, disposable diapers, dead animals) that the nearby villages were discarding along the banks of the river. "If anyone there has a chance to receive some kind of economic indemnity, they will say the petroleum is making them cry," Velázquez—a retired police chief and consultant—had told me when I interviewed him in a café in Lima. "I have

done the research. In order for petroleum to generate a little pollution, you would have to have been put in a barrel of crude for three or four days. I swam in the Río Chiriaco two months ago and everything was fine.”

“Anyone who says that petroleum is harmless is lying,” says Dr. Fernando Osoreo after ten hours attending to the children of Nazareth in the community house. “There is a reason the ancient Peruvians called it the ‘devil’s excrement.’”

As an expert in environmental toxicology and tropical diseases, Osoreo has traveled all over Peru studying multiple cases of contamination caused by extractive industries. When a spill takes place, he explains, millions of molecules of hydrocarbons rapidly evaporate and expand as poisonous gases. Someone breathing them in for even a few minutes will suffer headache, dizziness, and an upset stomach. If someone is exposed to petroleum for days without protection, it is worse: skin rashes, sore throats, and difficulty breathing. Petroleum is a complex mixture of various hydrocarbons. Some of them (such as benzene and xylene) can damage the nervous system and even cause cancer over time. Crude oil spilled into the current of a river is another problem. It divides into tiny drops that mix with particles of clay and form sediment on the bed of the river. The chain begins there: the polluted particles feed bacteria, the bacteria plankton, and the plankton fish. And the fish feed human beings. Osoreo says that the petroleum can’t be seen with the naked eye, but it is having an effect.

“We are looking at a chemical disaster,” concludes the doctor.

Osman Cuñachí still has rashes and warts on his legs and bumps on his arms due to contact with the crude. His brother Omar suffers from headaches and diarrhea. Like them, several boys and girls in Nazareth began to feel ill after taking part in the cleanup. At a meeting held a week after the spill, the community sent a communiqué to the President of the Republic and the Minister of Health demanding immediate attention. The communiqué included a list of the names of all the children who had gotten sick after gathering up the crude. There were more than sixty of them in Nazareth alone. Petroperú has donated tons of foodstuffs and water and has carried out health campaigns to provide attention to the families affected. The Ministry of Housing has constructed bathrooms with new toilets and a network of pipes that carries water from the gorge to the houses in certain parts of the community. Nevertheless, the head of Nazareth insists that the government has not performed a toxicological evaluation of the residents.

As of July 2016, four months after the spill, no one in this little piece of rain forest knew whether his or her health had been affected by contact with the petroleum. The analyses carried out by Dr. Osoreo are the first attempt to find out.

¶

The engineer from Petroperú supervising the cleanup of the Chiriaco spill is from Lima, fifty years old, with a straight nose and a rapid way of talking, who every twenty minutes reminds me not to give his name in my story because he is afraid of losing his job. “Do you know what happened to the last engineer who talked to a journalist without authorization?” he asks me, opening his eyes wide. “They gave him the sack.” In spite of his corporate secretiveness, the anonymous engineer allows me to accompany him during his working hours. The operations camp, near the zone of the spill, is a line of blue and green tents pitched alongside the highway and flanked by very tall trees. Inside them are workers consulting maps, a couple of engineers reviewing Excel files on their laptops, and a woman doctor, carefully made up and very bored, trying to escape the sweltering heat in front of two fans going full blast. Next to the camp there is a stone bridge and a one-armed security guard in an orange vest and helmet. At the entrance, an enormous sign with white capital letters on a red background reads: **HIRING OF MINORS PROHIBITED**. A measure taken by the company, someone explains to me, in order to keep the press from chattering.

“At Petroperú we do things right,” says the engineer.

It is a hot morning, with a muggy, exhausting humidity. We drive around in a van full of bags of rice and beans, cans of tuna, and bottles of water, donations from the company to some of the schools in the area, which are normally supplied with water by the now polluted river. The engineer tells me the cleanup work will soon be finished.

“It is impossible to leave everything exactly as it was before the spill. We have done everything humanly and technically possible. What I can tell you is that we have given work to more than eight hundred people, with wages they are never going to get again in their lives.”

Seated beside me, Yesenia Gonzales, the engineer’s assistant, says that what he says is true, and she tells me all she has achieved by working for Petroperú. Yesenia lives in Chiriaco, but she was born in Piura, on the northern coast of Peru. She is twenty-four years old, with a round face and

straight hair as black as her eyes. She has been working for the company for three months and has done everything: always wearing rubber boots and a special suit, she has gathered up the crude sunk in the river, carried bags of contaminated soil, cleaned stones one after another with high-pressure hoses. For each day of work, from seven in the morning until six in the afternoon, she was earning one hundred and fifty soles (forty-seven dollars) and twice as much on Sundays.

“No one pays like that around here. In a restaurant you have to work all day for twenty *soles* (six dollars). In the fields they pay thirty (nine dollars). I am very grateful because by working with the petroleum I could make my money.”

The enthusiasm of Yesenia Gonzales recalls another, older enthusiasm. The enthusiasm of when the Peruvian rain forest was imagined to be a space where the promise of prosperity would be fulfilled, thanks to the resource it concealed in its entrails. The first time an oil well was drilled in the jungle it was front-page news. The newspaper *El Comercio* reported on November 17th, 1971: “Five hundred workers in the Trompeteros region [Loreto] sang, danced, and bathed themselves in petroleum, carried away by joy about having made a discovery of transcendental importance to the economy of our country.” The president of Petroperú, a general in the military junta, declared: “The economic future of Peru is guaranteed.”

The opening up of the Amazon region to the petroleum industry in the 1970s had profound consequences on the inhabitants of the region, and especially on the indigenous people. The last time the Peruvian rain forest had been so coveted was during the bloody rubber boom of the mid-nineteenth century. Until then, the indigenous societies had produced everything they needed themselves: they hunted, fished, gathered, cultivated the land. They did not depend on the exterior for their sustenance, but neither did they have access to things they didn’t produce themselves. Years later, the oil fever and the construction of the Oleoducto Norperuano generated a massive demand for manpower in the Peruvian rain forest. With the wages paid by the companies, the indigenous people—especially the men—purchased radios, shotguns, medicines, and other products that were lacking in their homes. Not a few of the men spent their money on beer and prostitutes. Entire native communities went from being self-sufficient to depending on money earned from the oil companies. People moved to the cities or to the work camps in search of a better future. Some

of them forgot their language and customs. In the city, they thought, they could be *someone*.

Nearly a half-century later, in the streets of Chiriaco, fifteen minutes by *mototaxi* from Nazareth, you can hear the sounds of a village in an apparent process of development. The motors of minibuses looking for passengers. The voices of girls in tight jeans selling food on the street. Reggaetón music blaring in stores with cable television. Praises being sung in the doorway of an evangelical church. Loudspeakers announcing every five minutes: “Two people needed to unload the truck.” The dry crack of workers breaking stones to build a house. Babies crying in the arms of their mothers lined up outside a bank. Since the day of the spill, Chiriaco seems to be a miniature version of any of the poorer districts of Lima: increasingly noisy, more full of cement, nearer to what we call modernity. “Working in oil” increased the number of *mototaxis* and stores. It filled the cantinas, hotels, and brothels with clients. There are those who joke about “putting another hole in the pipeline.” The jobs that hundreds of indigenous people and mestizos obtained here to clean up the spill put more money in the pockets of everyone. Or almost everyone.



Edith Guerrero, a nutrition teacher and lover of bamboo, says she will never forget the day a Petroperú engineer tried to convince her that petroleum was good fertilizer for her rice fields. She is standing now in the rain at the mouth of the Inayo gorge where the crude poured into the Río Chiriaco. Until the day of the spill, Edith had eight hundred plots of bamboo, cows grazing, tall plum trees and laurels, and a clean stream in which the Awajún also fished. Now, four months after the incident, her forty hectares of land look as if they had been turned up by a dozen excavators. The tallest trees were cut down to make bridges. All her bamboo was pulled up in the process of cleaning the ground. She took her cows to neighboring pastures. Her entire plan to sow rice was ruined. The water of the gorge, which she had used to irrigate and give to her livestock, is now polluted. Seen from above, the gorge winds now like a deep, oily scar through her property.

“The local indigenous people are not the only ones affected,” says the long-legged farmer, born in the Cajamarca sierra. “The workers pulled up my bamboo without permission. They told me: ‘Don’t worry. Petroperú will pay.’”

Edith Guerrero says that, in spite of her claims, and unlike other farmers to whom damages *were* paid, the company has not so far acknowledged her losses. One day in February she went to the Petroperú work camp, but the engineer who saw her said she didn't know anything about the matter. "Do you not know where they are cleaning up the petroleum either?" asked Edith. "Well, in the gorge, and the gorge is public land," answered the engineer. Edith left the camp and got on her motorcycle. When she got back, she shouted at all of the company workers to get off her land. The next day she arrived very early, accompanied by her husband. They blocked the road with barbed wire. When the workers returned, she was waiting for them with some long branches of nettle, like whips. A week later, a Petroperú engineer came to visit her. She insisted he sign a document in which the company agreed to pay all expenses, though no dates or figures were specified.

Now, there are eight hundred cylinders with petroleum gathered from the gorge covered by blue plastic sheeting. Some men in rubber boots and orange helmets are at work gathering up the little petroleum that remains. There is a pile of sacks of contaminated soil and weeds. Some yellow hoses stretched across the bed of the gorge hold back what remains of the petroleum: an oily film on the surface of the water.

Edith remembers when the environmental authorities arrived to survey the damage, picking up samples of contaminated soil with special gloves. They used masks because they said the odor was toxic. It wasn't the first time they had dealt with a case like this. According to Osinergmin, the institution that investigates companies in the energy sector for tax purposes, over the forty years the Oleoducto Norperuano has been in existence, there have been sixty-one spills: 70% of them due to corrosion or poor maintenance and 30% due to sabotage and robberies. Three more have already followed the Chiriaco disaster in the Peruvian rain forest. The last one took place at the end of June 2016 in Barranca, Loreto. The Minister of the Environment publically denounced Petroperú: it had pumped crude when it was prohibited because the system had not been given proper maintenance. "The pipeline is obsolete," declared the minister on national television. A few days later, the president of Petroperú resigned, but not before presenting a positive account of his management: the company generated revenues of five billion dollars in one year. In his report there was not a word about spills. According to the experts, it is known that these happened because the pipeline had not received proper maintenance since 1998. The company

claimed that this was due to “austerity measures.” That it was not advisable to replace the entire pipeline because that would be extremely expensive. Under such circumstances, it is not ridiculous to think another spill could occur. Everything is suspect and smells bad, like the petroleum itself.

The last time I saw her, Edith Guerrero told me that Petroperú had called her to negotiate. The company needed to build a highway that would cross her fields and so could take away the eight hundred barrels stored on her property. The residents of Yangunga, the Awajún community located on the other side of the river across from her lands, tried to convince her: having the highway built would give them jobs, and they could even sell their plantains in the city. But Edith Guerrero told them she was not going to permit the highway to go over her property if Petroperú did not pay the seventy thousand *soles* (twenty thousand dollars) she was asking for all she had lost.

“Otherwise, I am capable of throwing the cylinders into the river, to see if those SOBs understand that.”

“And what did the last engineer who came to visit say to you?” I asked her.

“Don’t you know, ma’am, that petroleum is good fertilizer for your rice?”



A paradox of development: that something as terrible as an oil spill and the death of a river can be something temporarily profitable to a village. This does not make the news. Our political correctness in the face of environmental tragedies sometimes prevents us from understanding the fractures and contradictions of this ideal known as progress. The story of Nazareth, the home of the “petroleum children,” is just a small mirror in which we are all reflected. “The spill became an opportunity, but it doesn’t work if sooner or later you are contaminated,” says Yolanda Yampis, Osman’s mother, who worked on the cleanup and bought a refrigerator with what she earned. “My children are going to study now. I am also building my own house: I’ve already bought the bricks,” says construction worker Américo Taijín, who spent three months cleaning up the gorge. “My boyfriend was out of work but now he is earning good money. He just hopes he has nothing genetic because of spending all day around the petroleum,” says nurse Janet Tuyas, who hopes to become a mother before she turns forty. “Imagine, if my child were to be born sick?”

Janet is a young Awajún, with slanted eyes and an athletic figure, who has lived in Nazareth for several years, when she began to intern in the community's medical post. When I met her, during a round of vaccinations for children and infants (most of them suffering from malnutrition and anemia), she told me it was easy to tell who had received the benefit of a Petroperú salary. As we were walking along the paths flanked by old huts of cane and yarina, we could see some houses of even two storeys, made with new wooden beams and corrugated metal. A little cable television antenna crowned one of the roofs. In the same district, a few days before, the Minister of Housing and the Japanese ambassador had inaugurated more than a hundred bathrooms with new toilets, showers, and a network of pipes that would carry water from the gorge to every household. The comparison with the city was inevitable: the Awajún would not have to walk long distances in order to bring enough water in buckets. Now they would only have to turn on a tap to have water for drinking, bathing, or washing clothes. "We have all this, yes, but our river is practically dead," says Janet Tuyas sadly. "For months no one has bathed or fished in it... well, almost no one."

Sometimes, when the nurse visited some Awajún mothers, they would serve her grilled *boquichico* or the catfish called *zúngaro*, which they had fished out of the polluted river. In order not to be impolite, the nurse would lie: she would promise to eat the fish at home, but in fact she threw it in the garbage. She used to ask the mothers to wait until the river was clean again, until one of them replied rather angrily: "What are we going to eat then, since we have no money?" Since then Janet Tuyas, who earns very little, but enough to buy fish in the village, has decided to keep her mouth shut.



At noon the heat crushes everything in this part of the forest. The Petroperú van we have been making the rounds in makes its last delivery of food-stuffs. We park alongside the river, across from the indigenous community of Wachapea, one of the ten localities identified by the government as affected by the spill. The anonymous engineer tells me that this whole zone we see is clean now, that perhaps there are still "light stains, as if a drop of oil had fallen into the river." On the riverbank we are greeted by a grey-haired woman in a dark blouse with a wooden crucifix around her neck. She is Rosa Villar, principal of a girls' boarding school called Faith and Joy 62 San José. She asks if her students can now swim and play in the river.

“Because some of them already do so,” says the nun. “Just imagine: there are more than five hundred girls. After lunch they just go. The river is their world.”

“I really can’t tell you, you know that,” says the engineer. The company workers unload the bags of rice, the cans of tuna, the demijohns of water in silence. “Before I would have bathed forty times in the river! Now, if there are particles of petroleum in the roots of the trees, what more can I do? Turn the gorge upside down?”

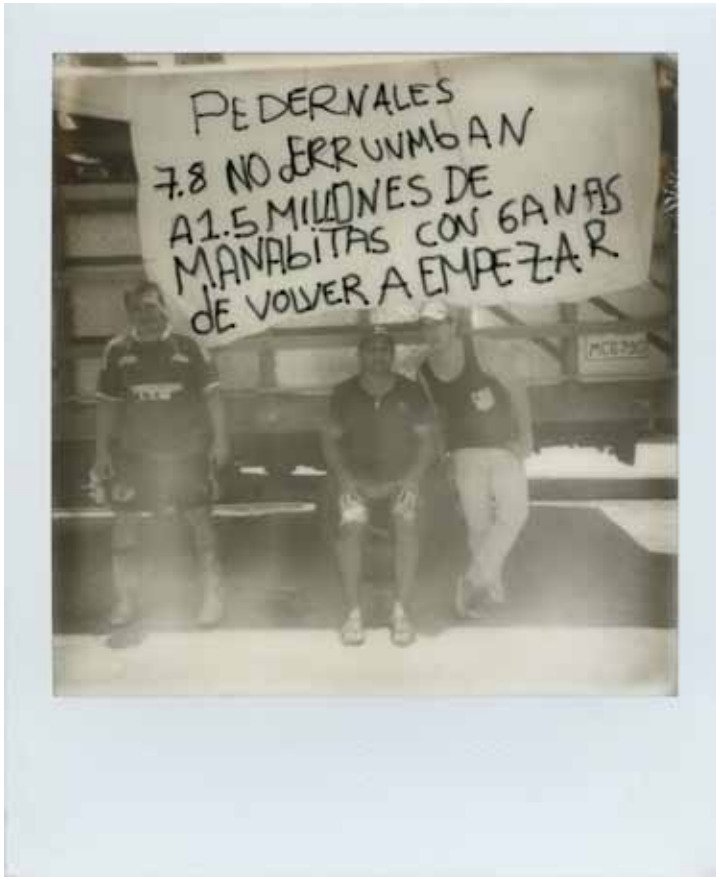
Later, as we are returning by an unpaved road to the company camp, Yesenia Gonzales, the anonymous engineer’s assistant, points out something to me through the window of the van: a cement house with a pitched roof, half-built.

“That is my house,” she says smiling. “People tell me that if I already have my own house at twenty-four, there’s no telling what I’ll have later on!”

Yesenia says that several of her friends have worked on the cleanup and it has been very good for them. One of them had his eyes operated on. Someone else took her daughter to Lima to have a heart operation. Another friend, a single mother, bought some land in Chiclayo, one of the most populous towns on the coast.

“In spite of the damage, there are people who feel happy about what happened.”

You might think it’s just being opportunistic. But no, she says. It’s survival.



Pedernales, 7.8 in Richter's scale do not overthrow 1.5 million of people from Manabí that are willing to start again.

**MISHA VALLEJO e
ISADORA ROMERO**

Handwritten



EL TSUNAMI ESTÁ
EN LA MENTE.

The tsunami is on our minds.



Going through rough moments, time goes by and I still cannot study.
Pavel.



Por lo material no importa
lo q Duele es la muerte de mi
sobrina pero hay q seguir vivo

The material stuff doesn't matter. What hurts is the death of my niece, but
we have to keep going on.



Pedernales;
Dios nos sacude para
enmendar nuestras err-
ras; gloria a Dios

Pedernales: God shakes us up to amend our mistakes. Glory to God.



Se me fue la casa abajo pero
estamos bien.

My house came down, but we are fine.



LO MATERIAL CON ESFUERZO SE
RECUPERA! LA VIDA NO! VALORABLE!

With effort we will get back the material stuff! But not life!
We need to value it!



me siento mal por lo
que paso

I feel bad about what happened.

What to say when you have lost everything? When you have lost a member of your family, a neighbor, or a friend? What to say when the future is uncertain and the present precarious? The need to talk, however, is imperative. To tell how they experienced and live through this tragedy, how they felt it then and feel it now, what was lost and what hurts. The need to tell their desires, needs, and hopes. To tell it with their presence, their words, and their traces, which are gradually being erased, as the debris is cleared and assistance wanes.

This project began one week after an earthquake measuring 7.8 degrees on the Richter scale hit the Ecuadorian coast. Based on the premise of psychological emergency, the photographs were taken during a process of listening and empathetic containment. The pictures are portraits of a fleeting instant, as brief as the moment when these people's private and familiar world came to a halt. Then the catharsis: to describe what they feel, think, or desire.

The photographs were taken in the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas, those most affected by the earthquake. The people of Muisne, Chamanga, Pedernales, Jama, Coaque, Canoa, San Vicente, Bahía de Caráquez, Portoviejo, and Manta tell their stories. They do so in the temporary shelters where they now live, on the rubble of their former homes, or in tents outside their houses, where they sleep in fear of new tremors. They also tell them from the broken and empty structures, still standing, that they visit daily, waiting for the technical appraisal that will confirm whether their houses can be repaired or should be demolished.

How to continue when everything or almost everything is lost? With the mettle of these people, who are much more than a statistic, and with the strength of helping hands that will still be needed during reconstruction for a long time to come.

www.mishaka.com / www.runaphotos.org

www.isadoraromero.com



Estos son mis nietos que agradezco
a nuestro señor Jesús que no ha pasado
nada de lo que dijo que protegerá a
toda mi familia al todo Tarqui

These are my grandchildren and I am thankful to our Lord Jesus that nothing happened to them. I hope God will protect my whole family and all of Tarqui.





como ben aqui en mi albergue
descansando y esperando que
pase Todo esto q esta pasando

As you can see, I am here in my shelter, resting and waiting for everything
to be over.



me Hago La fuerte por mi
mami pero me dan ganas de
llorar

In front of my mom I act strong, but I feel like crying.



GRACIAS A DIOS : MIS PADRES VIVOS!
EN UNA CIUDAD TOTALMENTE
DESTRUIDA?

Thank God! My parents are alive! In a totally destroyed city!



We need to draw strength from where there is none...
To start over from zero.

MÁRIO MAGALHÃES

The Flowers of Vila Autódromo

“ The pioneers of the occupations on the hillsides were former slaves who found themselves without homes or land.”

HELOISA HELENA COSTA BERTO lay on her front. Clenching her fists, she put her left fist on the concrete floor, and placing her right fist on top of it, she rested her forehead on them both. Though her spine had been beaten by time and was held together with eight screws, it did not threaten her with any pain. If it had hurt, she would not have noticed. Perhaps she would have felt like she had been bitten by a mosquito, if that.

It was not Heloisa hunched before the altar in reverence, but the *ialorixá* Luizinha de Nanã, priestess of the temple Yle Axe Ara Orun Yaba Jiye. This is the name Heloisa goes by in Candomblé. Luizinha had cast the cowrie shells, which had foreseen her departure. Heloisa cried for a week. So then Luizinha put on a colourful skirt, offered sacred food to the goddess Nanã and asked about her destiny.

“I’m not leaving here,” warned Nanã, an old female *orixá* who was accustomed to the calm, muddy waters. Noticing that she was angry, Luizinha became distressed, asking “Why must I continue to suffer?”. When Nanã replied “I want so much more for you,” she felt humiliated, blamed for not having done enough to remain in her house by the Jacarepaguá lagoon.

Heloisa lived at number 144 on the Avenida do Autódromo. It was called Casa de Nanã, a Candomblé temple. This religion crossed the Atlantic with the African slaves, amongst whom were Heloisa’s ancestors. Brazil was one of the last countries to abolish slavery, back in 1888. In the twenty-first century, one of Heloisa’s daughters was called a monkey on a technical course.

Luizinha de Nanã began to develop during Heloisa’s adolescence. The girl shaved her head in a Candomblé rite of passage. She discovered that Nanã, who was slow like her, was the *orixá* who guided her and over whom she would watch. She became a *mãe-de-santo* or *ialorixá*, the name given to the women who lead the temples.

“It might be a poor house, but it’s mine,” said Heloisa in 2013. She had lived in the back of her mother’s house, a wooden shack, with her husband, two daughters and two sons. When there were storms, the shack would flood. It felt as

though there were more leaks in the roof than stars in the pale sky of the early mornings. She left, then returned to build a house from bricks and set up the temple with a name in Yoruba, an African language. She planted trees and collected sacred herbs.

In the trances and magic rituals, to the sounds of chanting and *atabaques*, the smells of lavender and coleus delighted the worshippers. They were hoping for a brighter future. But on the 2nd of October 2009, a shadow fell over the Casa de Nanã.

That night in Copenhagen, with all the authority invested in him as president of the International Olympic Committee, the Belgian count Jacques Rogge proclaimed: "I have the honour to announce that the Games of the 31st Olympiad are awarded to the city of Rio de Janeiro." Rio had beaten Madrid, Chicago and Tokyo. Crowds celebrated the victory on Copacabana beach. But 30 kilometres to the west, in the Vila Autódromo, there was silence.

That was where Heloisa's house was. On the other side of a white wall, on the site of the old Formula 1 circuit, they were planning to build the Olympic Park. There had already been motives and pretexts behind several attempts to destroy the Vila and evict its 1252 residents. The poor neighbourhood of 588 homes had begun life as a favela decades beforehand. But there had never been a reason as urgent as the Olympics, an event celebrated by most Brazilians. A few years later, facing imminent eviction, Luizinha appealed to Nanã for a prophecy.

The *orixá* did not talk about what was to come, but she encouraged her to persevere, and that was exactly what she did. The house belonged to Nanã even more than it belonged to her, and it was built on sacred ground. She dreamt of a greedy, sadistic wave, flooding the whole Vila. The only reason she did not consult the cards for a prediction was that she had not touched them since they had prophesied the death of her mother. Dirce had always maintained the good health of her youth, when she paraded as a model. But then her daughter saw in the cards the dreadful combination of the coffin and the cross and her mother died of cancer seven months later.



Mother's Heart was the nickname that the locals gave to the type of truck used to transport dangerous criminals in the 1960s. There was always room for one more, hence the nickname. At 14 years of age, Altair Antunes Guimarães was neither dangerous nor criminal, but he was still thrown onto one of those hulks. He felt as if he had fallen from paradise.

But paradise is always a question of perspective. Altair and his family had just been evicted from a favela on the island of Clube dos Caiçaras, on the Rodrigo de Freitas lagoon. Whoever looked upon the shoals of fish leaping beneath their house, a shack supported above the water by stilts, would think it a precarious and inhospitable dwelling. But not Altair, who had lived there since he was just a year old. He used to love catching mullet and putting them into a wicker basket for big family meals. As soon as he awoke, he would see Christ the Redeemer; later, he would bathe in the sea at Ipanema and Leblon, in front of apartment buildings of the highest price per square metre in the country. Rio really did seem like the Marvellous City, the title of its anthem. Altair's father was a cook, and had chosen the location in order to be close to the restaurants where he would seek employment.

The Mother's Heart was taking Altair to the Cidade de Deus, 25 kilometres away. Like Vila Kennedy and Vila Aliança, it was a social housing project funded by the United States. All were located in West Rio, which was being used to re-house residents evicted from the south of the city. South Rio was for the middle class, upper-middle class and the rich; West Rio for the middle class, lower-middle class, the poor and the wretched.

In spite of this social geography, Rio remained different from other cities which confined their poorer citizens in distant neighbourhoods on the outskirts, because of the hills that intersected the coastal plain. The pioneers of the occupations on the hillsides were former slaves who found themselves without homes or land, while in 1897, they were joined by soldiers who had fought in the War of Canudos, a conflict in which the army exterminated thousands of rebels from a community in the state of Bahia. The poor soldiers settled on a hill close to the port. They called it *favela*, the name of a plant common in Canudos, which gave rise to the name now used to define a given type of urban settlement. Today the Morro da Favela is called Morro da Providência.

In the decade in which Altair left South Rio, the city government resolved to eradicate the favelas, citing the risk of landslides and poor sanitary conditions. Just as had occurred on the island of the Clube dos Caiçaras, nobody was left on the Morro do Pasmado, in Botafogo, which enjoyed spectacular views of the Guanabara Bay. The government sent everyone to Vila Kennedy, which meant that residents had to travel for more than two hours by bus to reach their places of work. Meanwhile, on Pasmado they built an apartment building for the middle class.

The dictatorship in power at the time preferred to eliminate the favelas rather than urbanize them and provide them with public services. From 1960 to 1975, 140,000 favela residents were evicted. In the 1964 musical *Opinião*, the samba artist

Zé Kéti sung the verses “They can arrest me / They can beat me (...) / But I won’t leave the hillside, no.” In 2010, 1.4 million people lived in favelas in Rio, 22% of the city’s population. In the favela of Rocinha, home to 69,161 people, life expectancy is just 67. In Gávea, the adjacent neighbourhood, it is 80. In the most recent census, 50.7% of Brazilians identified themselves as either black or mixed-race. In the neighbourhood of São Conrado, this falls to just 16.7%. In the favela of Vidigal, just next door, it is 58.9%. The hills and the asphalt, as the locals refer to the city built on the plain, have become metaphors for inequality.

When the Mother’s Heart arrived in the Cidade de Deus, Altair became just another statistic of the evictions. The temporary accommodation where the family was put became their permanent home. Beneath the corrugated iron roof the house heated up like a furnace. Altair dropped out of school as an adolescent to sell ice lollies and labour on building sites. He got married and had three children.

At the beginning of the 2002 film *City of God*, which made the Cidade de Deus internationally famous, the character Rocket warns that those seeking peace should look elsewhere: “If you run you’re dead, if you stay you’re dead again.” This was what happened to Altair’s brother Altamiro, a garbage collector who became caught up in the drugs trade. He fell under the suspicion of some dealers and was shot dead.

Altair hated the Cidade de Deus, but he too had nowhere else to run. In another one of life’s little ironies, the government decided to demolish his house to open a new highway, the Linha Amarela. So in the mid-1990s, on his 40th birthday, Altair was evicted for a second time. The owner of a small bar had a 550-square-meter plot of land in the Vila Autódromo, also in West Rio. Altair bought it, paying half the value in money, half with a beaten up old Chevette.

He drove stilts into the banks of the Rio Pavuninha, a stream surrounding the community. Then, brick by brick, he built his best house yet. He delivered newspapers by day and spent his nights working as a watchman. His second wife, Vânia, worked long hours as a maid in the local area. The couple adopted a granddaughter of Vânia’s, Naomi, who had been named after an English supermodel. For a long time, when recalling his move to the Vila Autódromo, Altair would say “I left hell and moved to a little piece of heaven.”

¶

In the Vila Autódromo, they were creative with names. One couple who supported Flamengo, Brazil’s most popular football club, had eight children, all of whom were given names beginning with the letter F. The four children of the acupuncturist Sandra Maria de Souza were named Izis Lua (Isis Moon), Jade Sol

(Jade Sun), Flora Terra (Flora Earth) and Pérola Luz (Pearl Light). Streets were named after famous Formula 1 drivers: Graham Hill, Denis Hulme, Gilles Villeneuve, Francisco Landi and François Cevert. There was even a Rua Pit Stop. Rua Nelson Piquet got its name from the racetrack on the other side of the wall. Rua José Carlos Pace was named after one of the eleven curves of the racetrack—the same number of streets as in the community. But despite these associations, the Vila Autódromo was never a fast place.

Ayrton Senna, whose name was given to a nearby avenue, completed the 5301-metre circuit in 1 minute, 25 hundredths and 302 thousandths of a second. But the pace of the Vila Autódromo was more like that of Gabriela, a tortoise who lived there for 44 years before she disappeared. The narrow dirt roads of the community gave it the feeling of a rural village and the smell of damp earth recalled the countryside, not the city.

The track opened in 1977 and in the moments when the cars were not roaring around the circuit, it was a place of silence and solitude. The first fishermen camped in shacks covered by plastic in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They left the Jacarepaguá Lagoon loaded up with bass, corvina and tilapia. The tide from the beach at Barra da Tijuca would rise, throwing saltwater into the lagoon, providing generous hauls of prawns.

The fisherman José Emídio dos Santos would eat banquets of capybara, armadillo and wild duck that he hunted in the area. But with the racing, the total quiet was over. Fortunately, the cars were not out every day. The population density increased. Having nowhere else to live, the workers on the racetrack stayed, being joined by construction workers who were labouring on the first luxury apartment complexes in Barra.

In its infancy, the informal settlement of the Vila Autódromo was an irregular occupation typical of the urban disorder of Rio, a city with a serious housing shortage. In the coming century, this shortage would rise to 220,000 homes. The Vila was a traditional favela, though built on flat ground. Then the panorama transformed with the construction of masonry houses built by the families themselves.

The households began to pay taxes to the local municipality. The utility company turned on the electricity. The houses acquired postcodes, plasma TVs, washing machines and parabolic antennas. The gas came in canisters. The sanitation company collected household waste three times a week. Families installed landlines. The landscape was dotted with lots of cocks and chickens, and some horses and young goats. The favela had become a neighbourhood, albeit a poor one; the residents referred to it as a community. Seen from above, it was full of round blue

dot—water tanks on the roofs of the houses. The problem was how to fill the tanks, and what to do with the waste.

In 2014, 49% of Brazilian households had access to sewage collection, with only 40% having access to proper sewage treatment. 83% had a piped water supply. Petitions for adequate sanitation facilities from residents of the Vila Autódromo piled up uselessly on the desks of public institutions. So the community took matters into its own hands. In order not to die from thirst and insanitary conditions, they began to siphon off water illegally from nearby pipes. They installed septic tanks in their yards, thus avoiding dumping sewage in the lagoon.

But the *in natura* sewage which came from Jacarepaguá, floating in the open air along the stream, skirted the Rua Beira Rio in the Vila Autódromo, on its way to the 4 km² lagoon. The filthy stream became a breeding ground for clouds of mosquitos. Fortunately, diseases transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti*, such as dengue and zika, did not proliferate.

With several rivers flowing into it, the lagoon was becoming increasingly polluted. People complained of a smell of dirty feet, rotten eggs and worse. The water, in which fish had once been visible, became dark, and the fishing declined. Unfortunate fish that were swept along on the high tide suffocated beneath tons of pollution in the moribund lagoon.

If the lack of sanitation was the worst thing, at least the security situation was reassuring. Many communities in Rio were controlled by drug gangs or paramilitary groups, but crime did not flourish in the Vila. It was a question of pragmatism: it was a small space, with no alleyways in which to hide, an off-putting location for those looking to make a quick getaway. So the Vila remained free of the stray bullets and rapes that so terrorized the rest of the city. Still, it could not stay out of the crime pages entirely: in 1993, the president of the residents' association was found dead in his bar, having been shot twice in the face. The facts of the murder were never established.

A colonel of the Military Police—a commander of the Special Operations Battalion—lived in the Vila, which was a microcosm of the social division in Brazil. He lived on the only paved street, in front of the lagoon, where there were two and three-storey buildings, garages and cars, moorings berths and boats. The Vila Autódromo also had its elite.

At first, the Vila and its surrounding area were considered part of the Curicica neighbourhood, though it had a Jacarepaguá postcode. This was until the property developers began to promote Barra da Tijuca, in West Rio, as a sophisticated neighbourhood to rival those of South Rio. The area around the Vila Autódromo

then began to be promoted as part of Barra. Before, there was the Jacarepaguá Racetrack. On its ruins, on the same site, now stands the Olympic Park in Barra.

In July of 2016, the average price per square metre for an apartment in Barra was R\$9,788, compared to R\$6,200 in Jacarepaguá and R\$5,596 in Curicica. Barra's Human Development Index score is equal to those of Norway and Iceland. Jacarepaguá's is at the level of Suriname and Kazakhstan.



The name of the neighbourhood did not matter to Maria da Penha Macena when she arrived in the Vila Autódromo with her husband and daughter. Everything they owned fit in a camper van. On that afternoon of the 9th of July, 1994, the Brazilian football team defeated Holland in the World Cup. Romário, Brazil's talisman and a local boy from the Jacarezinho favela, opened the scoring. Maria, Luiz and Nathalia celebrated more than anyone that day, but not because of Brazil's epic 3-2 victory in Dallas. They were just glad to finally be realising their dream of better life, away from the Rocinha favela.

At just 29, Maria had already been through a lot. She was born in Paraíba, a poor state in the northeast of Brazil, without a father to look after her. She heard talk that he was a train driver and had 22 children. Her mother went to try her luck in Rio, leaving her with her grandmother. "Who is this woman?" asked Maria, when, at six, she arrived in Rocinha to be reunited with the woman who had brought her into the world. A year later, she was already working like an adult, washing glasses and chopping herbs in a bar. At 11, she got a job looking after another child in Botafogo, "one child looking after another", as she recalls. She later became a maid, making beds, cleaning and ironing in South Rio apartments. In the favela, she set up a stall selling *angu à baiana*, a north-eastern cornmeal and meat dish, until two o'clock in the morning.

Since she was 14 Maria had harboured feelings for Luiz Cláudio da Silva, who was 17 when they got together. He had been brought up in Rocinha, but like her he had roots in Paraíba and had never met his father. They got married and together they bought a shack, which they knocked down and built a house on the same plot. When Nathalia arrived, her parents resolved to bring her up somewhere free from the bustle of the crowded favela. From an advertisement in the newspaper, they found a basic house in the Vila Autódromo, and invested everything they had in it. Hope, most of all.

They renovated their new house alone. It had two floors, plus three kitchenettes, a garage and five bathrooms. They did not finish it, because as Luiz

learnt through experience, “work on a poor man’s house is never done.” On the ground floor, they set up a bazaar that sold everything from school exercise books to sacks of cement. In 2005, the Vila had 52 commercial establishments, including a bakery and a beauty salon. Luiz, a former street cleaner, did a university course in physical education and began giving weight training classes in apartment complexes.

In the garden they planted two mango trees, two guava trees, an avocado tree and an acerola tree. They had 14 banana trees of two different types. “In the Vila Autódromo I managed to settle, put down roots,” says Maria. Deep roots, like those of her trees. Still, nothing is ever perfect: one of their coconut trees died and Maria suffered some disappointments in her “love life”. But she and Luiz nurtured their love, and they are still together today.

Upon their arrival, they had a fright—and not from the alligators that swam in the lagoon. Once, during a flood, with the water in the street a metre high, a resident opened their front door to be confronted by one floating around outside. Not for nothing was the area called Jacarepaguá, a name which means “place of alligators” in the Tupi indigenous language. No, their fright was to find out that the city government was preparing to evict them from the land.

And not just the city government: Rio’s businesspeople also. In 1986, the newspaper *O Globo* had warned that “the Commercial and Industrial Association of Jacarepaguá is anxious about the possibility of this situation damaging Rio’s image as a tourist destination.” The following year, the *Jornal do Brasil* announced that “the favela could be removed from the racetrack.” The government went to court in 1993, with a public civil case based on environmental conservation. It argued not only that the Vila was located too close to the lagoon and the stream, but that it had damaged the aesthetics of the landscape.

For the Vila Autódromo community, the alligators were the least of their worries.



Barra World Shopping & Park, Barra Square, Downtown, Barra Point, Barra Garden, Barra Shopping. A giant replica of the Statue of Liberty welcomes shoppers to the New York City Center. In the commercial centres of Barra da Tijuca, the Portuguese language is notable by its absence: *clube* is club, *edifício residencial* is residence. Long avenues mimic those of Miami. Going against the traditional Rio spirit of community, there are few pavements. No other neighbourhood promotes isolation in gated communities with quite such enthusiasm.

The *nouveaux riches* have gathered here. For this so-called “emerging

class,” with their lifestyle as extravagant as the gaudy colours in the work of painter Romero Britto, any mockery is just down to envy. The city began to expand to the west from the 1970s, while in 2011, Barra accounted for nine out of every ten property developments. But back in 1993, local residents had noticed that in just ten years the number of favelas in the area had shot up from 23 to 66. This was tarnishing Barra’s successful self-image.

The same year, a 23-year-old law student decided to put an end to these settlements. Eduardo Paes became deputy prefect—a kind of local administrator—of Barra da Tijuca and Jacarepaguá. He was successful in the favelas of Vila Parque and Vila Marapendi, where a woman slapped him. But Paes was tireless, like a hyperactive child. Tractors, municipal guards and employees from Civil Defence went to the Vila Autódromo to confiscate construction materials, though they were repelled by a blockade. Paes’s excuse was that the Vila had to make way for an ecological reserve.

Paes idolized Pereira Passos, mayor of Rio between 1902 and 1906, who demolished slum tenements, displacing their residents, in order to open beautiful boulevards inspired by those of Paris. He even imported sparrows, with the aim of bringing European sights and sounds to the old tropical colony. In 2008, following in Pereira Passos’ footsteps, Eduardo Paes became mayor of Rio.

But the Vila Autódromo no longer existed in the shade of illegality. In 1998, the government of the state of Rio de Janeiro (of which the city of Rio is capital), granted a “real right of use” to the residents. The land remained officially in the hands of the state, but the residents were granted the use of it for 99 years. Likewise, the Municipal Chamber declared the Vila “an area of special social interest” in 2005. Undeterred, the city government tried again to remove the Vila before the Pan-American games of 2007. Once again, it failed.

Then came Rio’s bid for the 2016 Olympics. The Vila appeared next to the Olympic Park in the first designs for the area, in both illustrated and model form. The Park would occupy the site of the old racetrack. But in Copenhagen, Paes announced the “end of the favela,” as it would have to make way for the media centre for the Games. Three construction firms would build the sporting arenas, like the basketball arena, in an area of 1.18 million square meters, bigger than the Leme neighbourhood. After the Games, they would be left with 800,000 square meters on which to build their attractive new developments.

Three kilometres from the Vila Autódromo, the 31 towers and 3,604 apartments of the Athletes’ Village, which hosted the Olympic teams, will be sold to the middle classes. This is in contrast to the Olympic Village in London, which

was sold off to low-income families after 2012. BBC Brasil interviewed Carlos Carvalho, the owner of one of the construction firms responsible for the Olympic Park and Athletes' Village. The community in the Athletes' Village will be called "Ilha Pura" ("Pure Island"). It is "high-class housing, not for the poor," said Carvalho. "To install piping, water and electricity, there is a high cost, which is paid by the residents. How are you going to put the poor there?" And on the Vila Autódromo: "Nobody wants to live in an apartment with Indians living next door. We don't have anything against Indians, but some things just aren't done. You stink. What do you think I'm going to do about it? Am I going to stay close to you?" From 2008 to June 2016, house prices in Rio—already the highest in the country—rose by 253%, higher even than the 226% increase in São Paulo. During the same period, inflation was 65% and the stock market fell by 13%.

Eduardo Paes condemned Carvalho for his comments. "He's horrified by the poor," said the mayor. But the fate of the "Indians" appeared to be sealed. The mayor announced that the Olympic Park would require another access road. The Abelardo Bueno and Salvador Allende avenues would also need to be widened. The Vila Autódromo was located at the intersection of these two avenues, and the houses were directly in the way of Paes's proposed construction projects. The community occupied 86,000 m². "The government wants to have the right of eviction if necessary to install a road, as we do in so many other areas of the city, within the law, respecting the rights of citizens without any type of terrorism," Paes told *O Globo*.

There was soon to be bloodshed in the Vila Autódromo.

¶

On the afternoon of the 3rd of June, 2015, Maria da Penha stood alongside her neighbours in a human chain, to prevent demolition of a house. They were demanding a week for the residents to move. The Special Operations Division of the Municipal Guard was there to ensure that the legal writ of possession order obtained by the government was carried out. "Just hold hands; don't link arms," urged Fábio Guimarães, Catholic priest at the Chapel of São José Operário in the Vila. "Nobody's posture is aggressive," said Guimarães in an appeal to the guards.

Soon afterwards, they attacked the residents with pepper spray, shot them with rubber bullets and beat them with batons. Maria—who is 151 cm tall and weighs just 41 kg—was supporting the septuagenarian known as Seu Brasil, concerned that he might fall down and be trampled underfoot. She did not even see the baton which struck her in the face between her nose and left eye. "Mom! Mom!" cried Nathalia.

Blood spurted and her eyes filled with tears. She felt treated like a criminal. Her nose had been broken, a bruise was already swelling up above her wounded eye and her white shirt became bloody, turning a colour darker than the wall of exposed brick against which she leant. More blood was spilt when Seu Brasil took a baton to the right temple. But another court decision, requested by the Public Defender, suspended the operation.

Tensions had been rising for some time. Since 2011, residents had been surprised on returning home to find the initials “SMH” (Secretaria Municipal de Habitação) painted on their houses in black paint, followed by a number representing the eviction process. With the residents protected by the usage title until 2097, the government proposed rehousing them in an apartment or paying them compensation. It also stressed that residents who were not in the areas close to the lagoon and the stream would be able to stay.

The apartments would be built 2.7 kilometers from the Vila in Curicica, in the social housing project Parque Carioca. The two-bedroom apartments measured 44 square meters and, according to Paes’ estimates, were worth R\$286,000, while the three-bedroom apartments of 61 square meters were worth R\$400,000. The complex would also have a swimming pool, playground, sports pitch and sanitation facilities.

The Vila Autódromo residents’ association, led by Altair, drew up an urbanisation project in consultation with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and Federal Fluminense University (UFF). The most precarious houses and those on the edge of the stream and lagoon would be demolished, and the residents rehoused in available properties and new four-storey buildings in the Vila. The new Vila would be 23,000 square meters and would have a crèche, at a total cost of R\$13.5 million. Despite its rejection by the city government, this Popular Plan won the Urban Age Award, sponsored by Deutsche Bank.

The government offered R\$120,000 for the house of metalworker Antônio Pedro Martins—not enough for him to buy a new house. Scared of becoming homeless, he agreed to move to Parque Carioca. The cleaner Luciana Souza da Silva, a mother of twelve, moved into a single apartment with her husband and children. As soon as a family left, their home was destroyed by bulldozers. The debris was not collected.

The wind blew up the dust, which caused itching and allergic reactions in the remaining residents. With children walking amidst steel reinforcing bars and rats, it was as though they were in the ruins of a bombed-out city. The postal service and the telephones were cut. There was no electricity or water. If a family on the

second floor of a building went out, their walls were destroyed with sledgehammers, even though the first floor of the building remained in place. The pickaxe blows which destroyed one house caused cracks in the walls of their neighbours. Desolate, many residents gave up, leaving behind their starving pets. Dogs killed cats, and cats came into houses looking for food.

“Not everyone has a price,” read graffiti on one wall. The artisan Jane Nascimento stood up to construction machinery and trucks, preventing their advance like the Chinese man standing up to tanks in Tiananmen Square. At a birthday barbeque, municipal guards tried to prevent residents from unfurling the national flag, alleging that the Vila was a construction site. In response, residents hung a national flag from the top of every house. Unintentionally, they hung one upside down, a reflection of the state of things. In visits to the Vila, where he participated in cultural activities, DJ Lencinho imagined himself in Asterix’s village as he resisted the Romans.

Families were divided. Some wanted to leave, others not. Maria was slandered as being mad. “Leave it,” an uncle advised her, “the mayor is too strong.” A bricklayer arrived from work to find half his house in ruins. It belonged to his ex-wife, and she had negotiated it from underneath him.

A single environmental licence of the government allowed them to chop down 324 trees. The birds migrated. With the houses gradually falling as well, the devastated Vila resembled a half-empty chessboard. The 58 properties that had survived until March 2015 were finally checkmated by a municipal decree which classified them as being of public use, paving the way for evictions. Altair did not want to see the demolition, the third time he had been evicted in his life. Heloisa Helena asked them to preserve an African oil palm and an akoko tree, sacred trees at the Casa de Nanã. She was told that they were rubbish.

“Though today they are knocking down my house, they won’t knock me down,” said Maria on the 8th of March 2016, International Women’s Day. She went to live in the chapel with Luiz and Nathalia. The offer they refused, R\$2.35 million, was close to a million dollars at the time, a fortune beyond their wildest dreams. “I built my house to live in, not to negotiate with,” said Maria with a shrug.

The municipality spent more than R\$200 million in compensation. The properties at the side of the lagoon went for as much as R\$2.99 million each. If there was a house and a kitchenette on the same plot, the government considered it to be two families and two residences. As such, the community was considered to be home to 824 families. Those who held out for longer received higher compensation and new intrigues and suspicions spread amongst the residents.

In March 2014, when Parque Carioca was opened, those who had left the Vila exclaimed “those who don’t move here aren’t right in the head!” But by 2016, the swimming pool was closed and the equipment in the playground was rusted and broken. The first floor of a five-storey building had been flooded. Newspapers reported that militias and drugs traffickers were active in the complex. Two-bedroom apartments were now being offered for R\$110,000 and three-bedroom apartments for R\$250,000. The media centre was never built on the site of the Vila Autódromo, which, likewise, never became an ecological reserve.

With her compensation, Heloisa Helena bought a house in Guaratiba, in West Rio, where she will revive the Casa de Nanã. Altair is preparing to live in an apartment for the first time in his life. On the afternoon immediately following the morning Maria’s house was demolished, Paes announced that he would allow some families to remain: the owners of the last houses scheduled for demolition amongst those who had refused to negotiate.

Twenty houses were built on the Rua Nelson Piquet, the only remaining street, which the mayor renamed Rua Vila Autódromo. Each house had an area of 56 m² on a plot of 180 m², and came with the right to add a second floor. There will be two schools and a sports pitch alongside them.

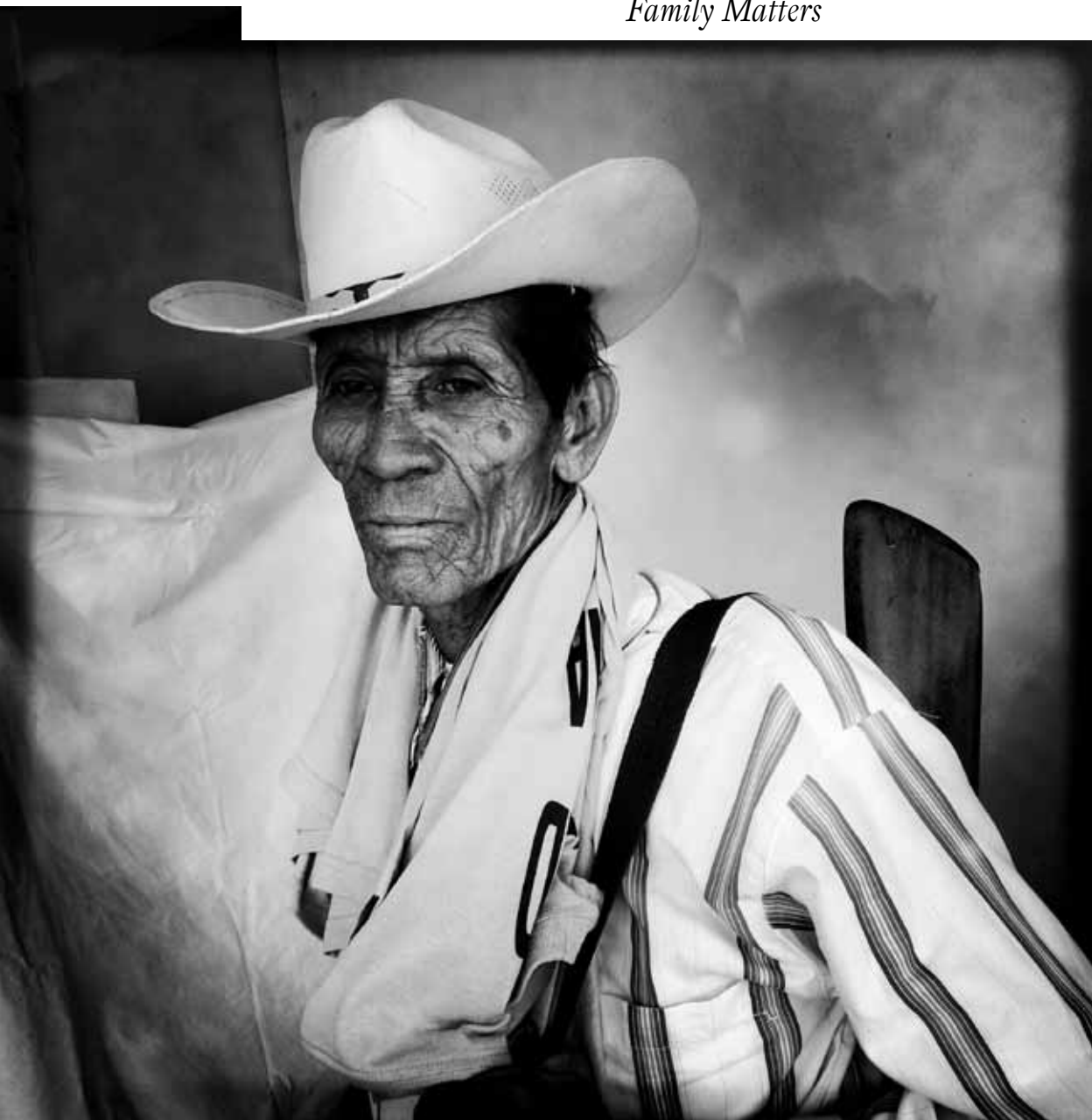
“The Vila Autódromo is a symbol of resistance to the evictions,” said Sandra Maria, the mother of Lua, Sol, Terra and Luz, at a public ceremony. Sandra was able to remain, and she will live in one of the new houses, as will Maria da Penha and her family. They received the keys on the 29th of July 2016, a week before the opening ceremony of the Olympics. For Maria, although there is just one street left of the old neighbourhood, it “will always be Vila Autódromo”. After receiving an award for her resistance, she offered an assessment of more than two decades of struggle and hope. “I found out that there are a lot of good people in this land called Brazil.”

Heading west along the new Rua Vila Autódromo, if you turn left and carry on walking a little further, you will find some yellow flowers in a thicket off to the right. If you look closer, you will see that an enormous pumpkin is growing behind them.

The land remains fertile.

ADRIANA ZEHBRAUSKAS

Family Matters



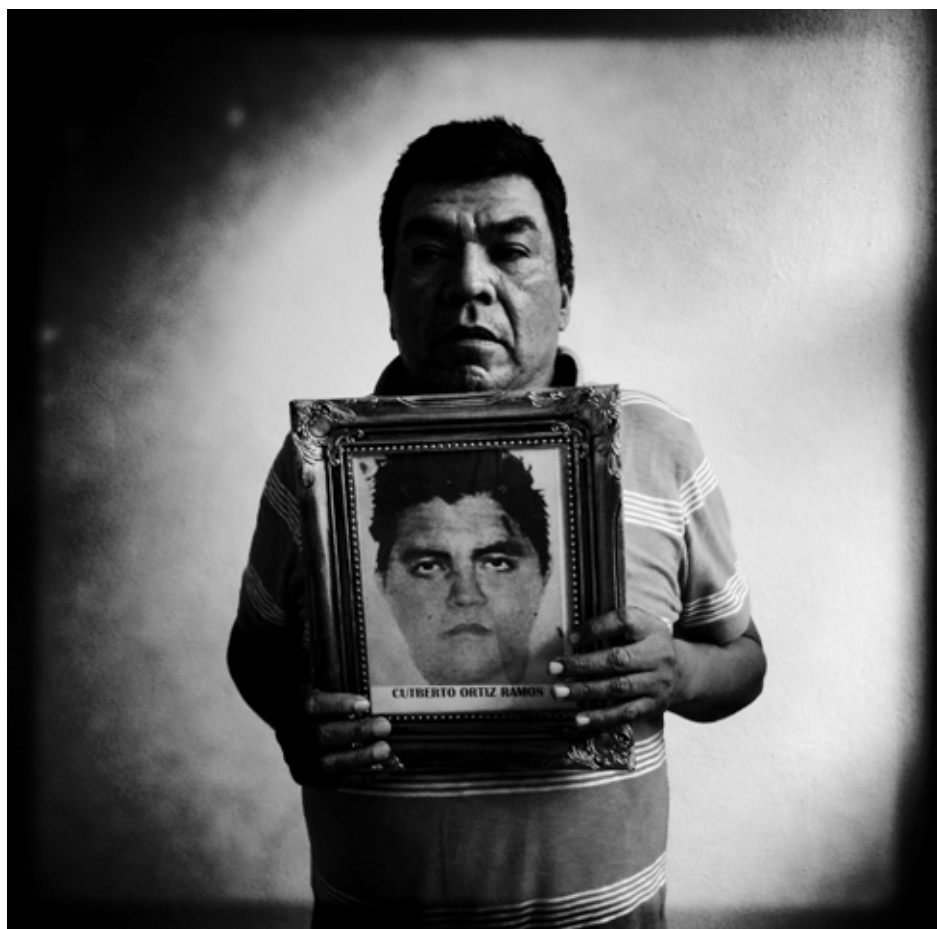
1. Don Severo, 62 years old, campesino and member of the Citizens' Community Police. The disorder and violence associated with the drug trade has given rise to dozens of self-defense leagues to protect the communities. Cruz Grande, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.



2. *Don Gerardo and his horse, El Güero. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



3. *Judith leaving church. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2016.*



4. *Óscar Ortiz Serafín with a photo of his son Cutberto Ortiz Ramos. Since his son disappeared, seven months ago, he has been sleeping at the school, waiting for him to come back. Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



5. Clothes drying in the sun. In Huebuetonoc, more than 90% of the population belong to the Amuzgo indigenous ethnic group and have preserved their language, customs, and traditional attire. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2016.



6. *Brígida Chora López, 83, the grandmother of Alexander Mora Venancio, the only one of the students who went missing to be officially identified. El Pericón, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



7



8



9. *Melisa and Isaiab posing for a photograph for the first time. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2016.*

7. *Ángel and Allyson with a photo of their father, a year after his disappearance. Tixtla, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*

8. *The dogs of Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



10. *Hen and tablecloth, at the home of Cristina and Guillermo. Huebuctonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2016.*



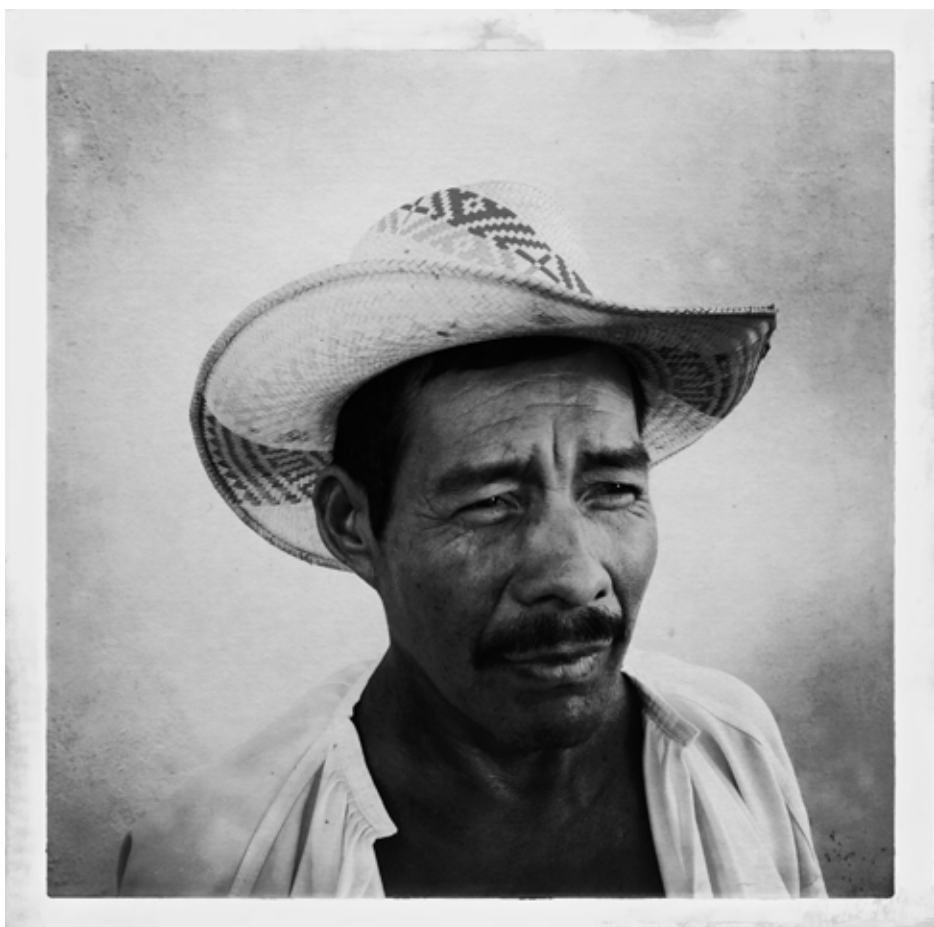
11. Brother and sister Ariana and Jordin pose for a photo in their baptismal clothes.
Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2016.



12. *Eugenio Zurita López, Marcelo Álvarez de la Cruz, and Esau López Luis, members of the self-defense group. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



13. *Mónica, Mariana, Celeste, and Yaribet. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



14. *Don Margarito. Huebuctonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*

In Mexico, according to Amnesty International, there are more than 27,000 people who have gone missing, who have been *disappeared*. In 2014 alone, the number reached a high of 6,000 in a single year. It is estimated, however, that the real figures are much higher. Many cases are never reported owing to fear of reprisals and distrust in local and governmental authorities.

As I worked with the families of the forty-three students of a rural teachers' college in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, who went missing in September of 2014, one thing became clear to me: these people had not only been robbed of their future, but also of the memory of their past. Apart from a few photographs on official documents and images taken with cellphones, few of the families possess photographs of their loved ones.

This seems paradoxical in the present age: never have so many images been produced, but fewer and fewer of these images are ever printed. And yet, who are we without our memories?

I have always been fascinated by family portraits and by all they represent and count for in our identities.

The story told by a posed portrait speaks of change in the course of time. Families look different in different photographs, which thus constitute a narrative of how and where we live.

Perhaps, through these images, we can affirm that, in a world that changes constantly and brings inevitable losses, there are things that time has no right to destroy. Perhaps our need to take and keep these photographs resides in our spiritual beliefs, in our conviction that life is not simply a series of physical impulses that lose their meaning once they cease to exist.

A person who has been photographed achieves a moment of redemption, saved from the fate of being forever forgotten.



15. *Jorge Luis and Dorian are brothers, grandsons of Doña Jakilina Virguen Baltazar. They are also two of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa who went missing. Xalpatlabuac, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*



16. *Doña Guadalupe wakes up at the crack of dawn to clean the patio of the little Hotel Soñador. Huebuetonoc, Guerrero, Mexico, 2015.*

CRISTIAN ALARCÓN

Death Didn't Get Nabila's Name

“Coyhaique today has the picturesque appearance of a small town surrounded by hills, yet it also has some of the same problems that beleaguer the largest cities: inequality, poverty, violence, and rampant machismo.”

THE ONLY TIME THAT ANGÉLICA NAHUELCAR has to straighten up her house in the El Bosque neighborhood of Coyhaique, a city in the Chilean part of Patagonia, is on Saturday morning. Today, at three o'clock in the afternoon, she has barely been able to cook food for her children and prepare the *yerba mate*. Seated in the kitchen of her small house, they lunch on *sopaipillas* with *pebre* and fried sausages. Sometimes, as Angélica tells it, she doesn't have enough money to give them anything to eat, despite working from Monday to Friday cleaning an office. This Saturday she worked some overtime. Angélica, forty-three years old, has raised five children. The oldest is in the military and lives in Iquique. The second oldest "is in an isolation camp," accused of having committed robbery. Angélica is a typical mother: she wants to believe her boy didn't know anything funny was going on when his friends left him waiting while they went off to look for some tools that didn't belong to them. Whatever the case might have been, he is now at least able to leave the camp to visit his family on Sundays.

Tomorrow they will await his arrival with the fire blazing in the wood stove, their only means of fighting off the extreme cold of winter. Coyhaique is an enclave of more than sixty-three thousand inhabitants in the region of Aysén, a nature sanctuary in Patagonia, and it is a focal point for the social struggles against the Hidroaysén hydroelectric dam project. It is also the most polluted city in Latin America. The smoke generated by its stoves turns the pure southern sky into a dark gray mushroom indistinguishable from that of a polluted megalopolis. None of Chile's coldest cities use much liquid gas; purchasing a tank of it is so expensive that most people can't afford it. For those who can afford it, there is dry beech wood for their stoves; those who can't must burn the damp pine that the municipality distributes for free in poor neighborhoods like El Bosque. The pine is hard to split; one has to go at it with a hatchet and brute peasant strength to reduce it into sticks small enough for use in the stove. When burnt, it produces a resin that sticks to the chimney walls, and what escapes into the air is pure dark poison.

The five-year-old girl observing us with large eyes is Antonia, the daughter of the young man who is in prison camp. Her mother cannot care for her, even though she lives just a few doors away. So Antonia has become the youngest child

of her grandmother. “My uncle brings me gifts when he comes to visit. One time he brought me a doll in a little car, with a baby bottle,” she says. Antonia plays with that doll all day long inside her house. Angélica doesn’t allow her to go out much. “The neighborhood is dangerous,” Angélica explains, “the tough kids hang out on the street corners to cause trouble. They bother whoever passes by, robbing what little we working people have to buy drugs for themselves.” Angélica believes she is discriminated against for the simple fact that she has “a little more education”; because she is conscious of the city’s problems and those of women throughout the area. The case of Nabila Rifo is one that made an impression on everyone because of its sheer brutality.

A month and a half ago, on a Saturday like today, Angélica heard about what had happened to Nabila. She learned about it like thousands of other women that day, between nine o’clock in the morning and three o’clock in the afternoon, when the news was shared over the social networks. At first Angélica didn’t believe it; it was too much. Until a friend called her:

“Hey, Angélica, did you see what they did to that girl?”

“No. Who?”

“Nobody knows her name yet, but she’s in the hospital because somebody gouged her eyes out, near her home, at the corner of Monreal and Lautaro,” the friend explained.

Angélica felt the same weakness in the pit of her stomach as the night they told her that her husband had been killed. Her legs buckled, “like they were made of wool,” she says.

Nabila was still a nameless victim at that time, but there had been a place named, and it was just beyond Calle Victoria, which separates the old town of Coyhaique from the teeming, poor neighborhoods that have sprung up, one after another, during the past twenty years. Angélica thought about how everything had happened in the depths of the night, while a neighbor’s dog was howling incessantly. Damn that mutt for waking her up, she had cursed to herself. But when the barking wouldn’t stop she thought: “My God! What kind of disgrace is going on out there?”



In Santiago the air in the city center is also polluted. On Avenida Portugal the cars zip by faster than usual. It is Friday, and the bums who live in the areas around the public hospital known as the “Posta Central” are relaxing on their makeshift cots of cardboard and old mattresses, their dogs stretched out alongside them. On the fourth floor of this building a team—of dentists, doctors, psychologists, nurses, and police—holds vigil to safeguard the life of the survivor from Coyhaique. Nabila Rifo, twenty-eight years old, is breathing the hospital’s air on her own in

the facility's most isolated room. They finally removed her from the mechanically assisted respirator on which she had depended for the first weeks. She has been here since May 14th, forty-five days now. That was the day her attacker left her blind, and with multiple fractures in the face and head—the medical report has indicated one in the occipital area, one in the temporal area, and another in the right cheekbone—in addition to the upper and lower teeth that she had knocked out, and her splintered jawbone. She had also been beaten on her legs and torso. Nabila had defended herself as best she could against her murderer. There is no doubt among those who have been caring for her every day that her attacker intended to kill her, and that she—by some combination of miracle, force, tenacity, and luck—didn't give in: her heart was still beating. Now she is here, in recovery.

Downstairs, in the corner of the Posta, there are the traces of candle drippings. Until it was known that Nabila had recovered consciousness, the feminists of Santiago came here to cover her in a symbolic embrace every afternoon. They hung placards on the black grillwork that are still legible: "Look out! Machismo kills"; and the warning "We women await you (with machetes and a noose at the ready)." There are more than eighty people milling around lethargically, each of their bodies bearing the mark of their suffering. As soon as one tries to move toward the elevators, armed men in green uniforms appear. One of them warns: "Nobody goes upstairs. There are only one soldier and one policeman. Only the patients and the doctors can go in, no one else."

Up until a few days ago, the doctors gave medical updates about Nabila at televised press conferences. During the past week, the State has cut off access to both her and her family. From Coyhaique, women's organizations report they no longer have any contact with her mother; the prosecutor's office insists that it isn't the appropriate route for seeking further information, saying it would be best to go through the Sernam (National Services for Women). The Sernam says that "Nabila's family has taken the unanimous decision to not make any public declarations, a position that is shared by the Intersectorial Circuit on Femicides."

¶

In this new period, since the tragedy, nobody can get to see Nabila, and she—quite literally—can't see anyone. Her sister Katherine answers the telephone in a tremulous voice. She listens to all the arguments put forth: that this isn't for a newspaper; it's for a book; that not everyone is some kind of yellow crow trying to peck mercilessly at the family. She says that it would be best to call back in five minutes, after she has consulted her mother, Noelia. Later, she answers again, but this time pretends that the call has been cut off. The media come out with a story about the long history of beatings that Noelia has had to endure from her last partner. Nabila was a witness to those punches, and it's said that she was the

one who denounced her step-father. Arriving in Coyhaique, the family maintains complete silence. It's logical; it's human nature, this silence that shrouds the aftermath of tragedy.

¶

In the heart of the stranger who soon will be leaving the country there is a sense of unease. Extra efforts are made to try to find a guide who can throw some light of local wisdom on the feeble traces left by a crime in such an insular a city—a kind of an island, seemingly only reachable by flight (overland routes to this region require traversing large stretches of water by ferry). Mariza Romero, an activist from the Colectivo de Mujeres Desnudando (Women Undressing Collective) who was born and raised in Coyhaique, receives me in her home and begins by laying out some context: Coyhaique is also part of the region of Aysén, seventeen hundred kilometers from Santiago, more or less at the same latitude as the Argentine cities of Comodoro Rivadavia and Los Antiguos. To the north, there are fishing communities; to the south, it is principally cattle ranchers, wool production, and mining. And then there are the newer arrivals, professional people who are in tune with the idea of progress. They are attracted by the pay offered to public sector workers here, which, with the premium offered for accepting employment in this harsh and distant zone, is double that paid in the rest of the country. In forty years the city's population has tripled.

Since its inception in 1929, this has been a place for men—poor, ignorant, and adventurous—who have come here from Chiloé or Argentina to do the hard work in the fields and the fisheries, working for the only boss there is here: landowner Mauricio Brown.

Coyhaique today has the picturesque appearance of a small town surrounded by hills, yet it also has some of the same problems that beleaguer the largest cities: inequality, poverty, violence, and rampant machismo. The indices of sexual abuse against women here is double that of the rest of Chile. Just last year there were more than a thousand complaints of habitual mistreatment, threats, and physical injuries. Seventy-one percent of the victims of what the government calls *vif* (interfamilial violence) are women. No one has any idea how many crimes go unreported because of fear of future reprisals.

Mariza Romero feels some relief from the descriptive introduction.

Then she warns, "The people keep silent here. It's said that whoever pushes too much to get to the bottom of things in Patagonia is wasting their time."

¶

Carla Saez wants to talk, regardless of the fact that they tell her she is nosy gossip. She feels that what she has seen and heard might help to make some sense out

of what happened so close to her house. The Saturday of the tragic event, in the afternoon, she could see the police operation and the mother of Nabila Rifo seeming lost among the cops, asking if the woman without eyes and agonizing in the hospital was her daughter. She knew who this “neighbor woman” was because she occasionally went to her bakery shop to buy bread: silent, discrete, just another housewife, nothing more. The one she saw more frequently was the man she refers to simply as “the neighbor.” She could imagine what they were like as a couple, though, because Carla had to put up with that constant “bam! bam! bam!” coming from the depths of their house on the other side of the fence, beginning in the afternoons between Thursday and Sunday. One Saturday in January she couldn’t stand it any longer.

“I heard children screaming like I’d never heard anyone scream before. It was so painful and anguished that it hurt your soul to listen to it. ‘No, daddy! NO! Don’t hit mommy anymore!’ That’s when I told my husband Alex to please go out there and do something. When he wouldn’t go out, I said ‘I don’t care if they call me a busybody. And when I got to the patio it seemed like they were breaking plates, glasses, bottles. And the children, ‘No, papa, please!’...”

Carla, her long hair hanging along one side of her face, is the mother of five children. She had no doubts about what to do. With a pole she banged on her neighbors’ roof.

“What’s going on over there?!” she yelled.

She didn’t expect that Mauricio Ortega, the neighborhood auto body repairman, would let himself be distracted by her. But glasses and bottles started flying through the fence, smashing right near her. The supplication of the children went on uninterrupted. They cried and pleaded “enough already.” Ortega’s insults continued on, too: “‘whore, your mother’s cunt, shit, shit, shit...’ was what he was screaming the most; shit, the whole time.”

“I never heard the woman at all; her part of it was total silence.”

A week later everything had calmed down. One day, Carla’s children lost track of their new kittens. From the other side of the fence, Nabila returned the wayward cats. She made no comment about the kerfuffle that had taken place previously. She didn’t say anything. Carla didn’t know that, in June, one of Nabila’s relatives had made a formal complaint about Mauricio Ortega having split open their door with a woodsman’s hatchet. Ortega is forty-three, thirteen years older than Nabila. Instead of sending him to trial, the arraignment judge gave him the option of a plea bargain, putting him on parole and asking him to sign in every week. He was also required to undergo therapy at a center for violent men, but he never submitted to that treatment.

¶

Two days before traveling to Coyhaique, Angélica Nahuelcar says what the others will end up repeating; she says it from El Bosque, in the whispering voice of the wooden houses that are built one right up against the next. One hears everything that filters through the pressed pinewood boards of which these humble dwellings are built. There are no secrets in the southern cities. Any disagreements gets disseminated like the wind that whips through the alleyways—those simulacra of streets that have permitted every new housing plan to bring in more and more people, squeezed tightly together and bunched on top of one another, even though they may live on the city's outer edges, with the open countryside just beyond, stretching into infinity. Angélica waits awhile before putting forth her suppositions, hypotheses that everyone has made their own.

It pains her to suggest that Nabila had been a woman of the night, that her poverty had compelled her from a young age to begin to work as a sex server, that it was known she waited tables at a local joint; and everybody and his brother believe that she was stigmatized this way because she had ratted on a mafia of sex slave traffickers. Here, Angélica notes, you're going to find a ton of dark secrets that nobody wants to know about. We all know about them, of course; but no one wants it known that they know. Coyhaique has its shadow—and in that darkness there fester prostitution, white slavery, and drugs.

¶

Monsignor Luigi Infanti della Mora has been called by some media the “rebel bishop.” Two events have marked his diocese. In 2003 a series of mysterious deaths of young people, twelve in all, which the bishop blamed on politicians, judges, and entrepreneurs in the region. “They pretended they were suicides, but they really were murdered,” he says even today. Then, in 2012, the largest social upheaval in memory, which was begun by the fishermen and taken up by the rest of the Patagonians, demanding subsidies to ameliorate the difficult conditions in which they live. Infanti was involved in the street blockages, the bridge closures, and on the barricades, putting himself physically on the line and confronting the police to try to prevent them from cracking down against the protestors. *Luigino*, as those in his faithful flock call him, is a youthful voice on the other end of the telephone: there will be no problem; I can accompany him when he goes to officiate afternoon Mass in Lago Atravesado, a small town about fifty minutes from Coyhaique.

The Monsignor rings the bell at the hostel at a quarter past five in the afternoon. He is the most elegant man in this town. In these events his figure can be recognized from far away: a gray wool coat, a pair of classic shoes with a highly polished sheen, and a black leather bag like the kind that doctors used in a bygone era. He looks like one of the Servants of Maria that arrived in Coyhaique in 1937. He drives

skillfully, but takes a wrong turn at one intersection. He enjoys telling stories. He asks about his interviewer's professional calling.

"You're writing a chronicle? We bishops have to write a 'chronicle'—that's what we call it—at the behest of the Vatican. We once published one of the first priests who came to this area, despite the fact that some of the stories were inconvenient. So that you might get some idea what I mean, at the end of the 1930s Coyhaique had a population of six hundred. Of that, two hundred fifty were prostitutes."

"In 1937 there was a serious accident in the area around Chile Chico: nine people died. The cadavers were brought to Coyhaique, and the town's mayor asked the priest to permit the funeral in the church. The priest said yes, except for one of them: the only woman among the dead. She had been the Madame of one of the whorehouses. It would be impossible to make room for a 'public sinner'. The mayor saw he had to insist: 'But Father, she has a right to it: she donated all the pews to the church.'" The bishop tells the story and laughs, just as we are arriving at the chapel in Lago Atravesado. There are fifteen worshipers waiting for him around a stove in which dry wood is blazing. The bishop asks about the desperate drought that has been afflicting the area. The snow just won't come, and the rivers have dwindled down to miserable little trickles of water snaking through the land.

¶

"That Saturday, at six in the evening, Nabila still had no fixed name. She was called Melisa, Natila, Nubia, and Nadia."

"Norma Cárcamo Levicoy is the activist companion-in-arms and soul mate of Mariza Romero. They met on the parental board of a school, and later worked together on a fishing boat, until one of the other fishermen wanted to take advantage of Normita and she whacked him in the face with a foul-smelling fish. A couple of years ago they realized they needed to find other women to share the experience of their bodies, of their lives. They formed a collective called Women Undressing; at first it was a reading group, then it became one to share projects. Together they have made the rounds of all the "restaurants" in the Aysén region, promoting the rights of the sexual workers. Mariza, with her indomitable head of reproachful red hair, husky voice, and university-trained pronunciation, is the more skeptical one—always in charge of logistics, of making sure nothing gets screwed up; Norma, the more balanced and calm one, with her jet black hair and what Mariza calls her "power to move the masses," is in charge of the discourses.

That Saturday, at a quarter past seven, a woman from the hospital called her.

"Did something happen to you?"

"No, to me no; but a girl was brought in whose life is in danger...they took out her eyes."

"What should we do?"

"I don't know, but we have to do something."

"We have to take to the streets!"

The network of women began to function at that very moment. Word spread from one woman to another, dozens of messages were sent; they said they were calm, but they were going to do something today, now, right away. At three o'clock in the afternoon they decided to march, beginning at five. Norma called the radio stations Apocalipsis, Ventisqueros, and Santa María. They went down to the center of the city through the streets, carrying a megaphone and some posters that one of them had designed. They thought they would be few in number, but people began arriving without any letup: families, young people, old folks, men... And when Norma spoke to them, the Patagonians, men and women alike, wept. "We're going to create an act of presence in the hospital where they brought her. We're going to recognize one another as neighbors—look at one another in the eyes," she guided them. The protestors amounted to about three hundred souls, and when the act was over they milled around talking, encouraging one another. Slowly, one by one, they began to pass to the front—to the megaphone—and offer their testimony. The women told of their own experiences getting punches from their fathers' fists, their boyfriends, and their husbands.

¶

That same Saturday, Bagual, a muralist who gives art workshops at the school Nabila's attend and in the Coyhaique prison, decided it was necessary to do a public mural, to make sure what had happened would not be forgotten. During the span a week, more than seventy people united to help finish the work, painted on the long wall of the city's soccer field, across from the prison. The day the cops took Mauricio Ortega to court, Bagual saw how some people circled around them as they brought the prisoner out of jail. They treated him like a jackal, insulting him, throwing rocks. These women were pretty furious. What could explain the horrendous nature of the injuries to Nabila? What brought these women—along with some of the young men—to the boiling point, where they would stone an alleged perpetrator? Part of the answer was visible on this long wall: the names of the victims of femicide during the past six years.

Each woman had been killed by a man. One knifed Karina Barría Muñoz. One slit the throat of Carolina Legue. One used his cell phone recharging cord to strangled Lorena Yáñez before hanging himself. One hit Marutti Martínez in the head with a hammer before committing suicide. Jeanette Vargas had been stabbed repeatedly. One split open the skull of Lorena Pineda and later hung himself. Nataly Arias was raped and strangled, her body only appearing long after having been stuffed in a sack. Hilda Almandos was stabbed eight times. All of these murderers had declared their love for the women they killed.

¶

Monsignor Infanti has a tough time believing in justice in Chile. That's why, although Nabila's spouse, Mauricio Ortega, has been incarcerated since May 17th and is being tried on charges of attempted murder, he feels it's still a question of waiting to see what will happen. It's been forty-seven days since that fateful Saturday, and Nabila still hasn't talked. There are rumors going around that she will be returning to the city, but nothing has been confirmed. The hope is that she'll be in condition to testify, although no one has the slightest idea whether or not she has even retained any memory of the attack. Most people feel she will keep silent because whoever did this did it to intimidate her, to shut her up forever. Infanti della Mora has seen the so-called justice system at work before, in the Aysén case. That time, the judges threw out the direct testimony of the only eyewitness, jailing him for alleged perjury, and going as far as jailing the lawyer who represented the family of the victims; the Coyhaique courthouse was set ablaze three times by arsonists, and the mayor threatened the bishop personally. So, in terms of the present case, the idea that Ortega acted alone doesn't square with his sense of how things happen here.

"In this case, the comments are insistent. There's more involved here than a crime of passion. Therefore, it's absolutely essential to investigate whatever links may exist with the underworld of drugs and prostitution. In the Commission for Peace and Justice we understand what the white slave trade is about: we helped a young woman who was brought here under false pretenses from Santiago, supposedly to work as a waitress in a restaurant. But they aren't restaurants; that's only the denomination they are given in order to apply for licenses and get commercial authorization. That same girl asked us, rhetorically, how we thought it was possible for any serious investigation of sex trafficking to take place when the majority of the clients in the whorehouses are policemen."

—
291

¶

The reconstruction of the final hours of that family—for whom violence and screaming had become an everyday reality—can be found in the judicial case file. And every step taken by the prosecutor seems destined to distance the conspiracy theories from the criminal evidence. It has become a standoff between rumor and proof. Everyone, both those who favor juridical truth and those who choose social truth, is now awaiting Nabila's version.

On July 20th Nabila sat down with district attorney Pedro Salgado and prosecuting attorney Luis González Aracena. With ocular prosthetics in place, and guided by the hands of one of her aunts and by a psychologist from the victims' services unit, Nabila admitted that for the first few days after she had regained consciousness she thought she wouldn't be able to denounce the father of her

children. “But when I realized will never be able to see again for the rest of my life, I decided to tell the truth about what happened.”

That fateful Friday, Ortega had worked until after seven in the evening. Then he went to buy his first few beers, to help shake off the exhaustion from his labors. He shared them with his only employee, a dent banger named Juan Mendoza, and with his uncle Eduardo Soto, who lived next door. That night, Nabila prepared oven roasted steaks. Ortega invited a friend, tow truck driver Eduardo Vilches, to dine with them; and it was Vilches who provided what would turn out to be the fuse that detonated the fury of that night: a bottle of Caballito Blanco whiskey. The dinner went peacefully, according to all the testimony provided. At midnight, the uncle went home to sleep, and Ortega invited his cousin, Gonzalo Bahamonde, who showed up with a friend, Alejandra Castro. The dinner became a party. Nabila and Mauricio’s two kids, age ten and twelve, played in their room. They are Nabila’s biological children, born when she was still a minor, from a relationship with a man who was nearly forty years her elder.

The first argument that night was on account of the music. Vilches testified that at a certain point he had requested a change; he wanted to hear and dance to traditional Chilean cueca. Nabila already had sufficient drink in her to cause her to lose her affability. She cut him off, insulting him, which shamed the macho of the house: “Now you’ve really done it,” Ortega told her. With the ambiance thus embittered, but without any stop to the partying, Alejandra Castro—who didn’t know anyone there—decided to leave, which she did at four thirty in the morning. A little after that, Vilches also split. As soon as they had left, Ortega became even more furious, and Nabila confronted him. She asked about the money she had given him to buy a car—the Suzuki parked outside—and he threw back in her face what he considered to be his great contribution to the household: “I filled the refrigerator for you.”

“This little shit is never satisfied with anything,” he screamed.

Nabila declared: “He was drunk. I had been drinking, too. He started breaking the glasses and tried to hit me, but Juanito and his cousin were holding him back, by the arms. He wanted to hit me with everything he could.” The children had awakened. They were crying. The oldest one sent a message to his aunt, Katherine Rifo: “Come and get us.” Nabila’s family home was only a few blocks away. Ortega was blind with drunken rage. He was kicking the washing machine, beating the walls, and smashing everything in his path.

¶

Nabila had been only thirteen years old when her father passed away. Her mother, Noelia, had to face up to her poverty with three children to look after. That’s when she took Nabila out of school, to help her with the housekeeping and caring for

the youngest child, who had been born mentally handicapped. Katherine, Nabila's other sister, was only four years old and was a "crystal skin child," suffering from epidermolysis bullosa, a genetic illness that leaves the skin blistered and lacerated from the slightest friction. At eighty years of age, Sister Mariucha remembers well the family of Nabila. She knew her father, and since his death she has cared for Katherine.

"Once she was widowed, a year after the girls' father died, the mother gave birth to a son who died from pneumonia. She had another daughter who was born mentally retarded and who was in the España School, but she took her out because she had to support the other children. And this one whose eyes they put out now, she was the oldest. The mother exposed Nabila to prostitution from an early age. She came here twice to visit her sister. I said to her 'What's going on? Why don't you get some different kind of work? Some kind of work that is more honorable, my child...' And—she had already given birth to her first child at age eighteen—she answered me, saying 'With what you offer me I'd have to work a week to make the same as I get now in one night. I'm not thinking about changing my work.'"

The supposed "bad life" of the victim has been the axis for speculations about the attack. Local media refuse to publish this information because they consider it "stigmatizing the victim." The national media did make it public, as a basis for the hypothesis that Nabila had been the one who denounced the owner of the Cabaret Acapulco, Nancy Gallardo Navarro, for sex trafficking. Nabila declared to the prosecutor that she had never worked as a prostitute, saying she had worked in the "restaurant" Bohemia for three years—beginning when she was twenty-two years of age—, cleaning and waiting on tables. She has the right to deny whatever she wants. According to observations from women's organizations, in Coyhaique—a city of sixty-three thousand inhabitants—there are some forty places dedicated to sexual commerce. In the "restaurants" like Acapulco, Sin Banderas, El Tucán, Oasis, or Gato Dorado, there are more than one hundred Colombian women working. Nancy Navarro says she doesn't know Nabila, but that she knows Ortega very well.

¶

Juan and Bahamonde left once Ortega had calmed down and gone out to the patio to smoke. Nabila was crying in an armchair. They walked to get a taxi, which they boarded at 5:30 am. The taxi left them off at 5:41 am. That's what the taximeter register reads. According to Nabila, Ortega had just been waiting for them to leave before turning on her again. She was only trying to think about how to escape. He stubbed out his cigarette and entered the living room again. He came in kicking: *patada y combo*, as they say in Chile. It's a set phrase. Millions of bodies have been

marked by *patada y combo* in this country, where violence has become naturalized. Nabila resisted—slapping at him, covering her face, escaping between the furniture. He was very drunk, she a bit less so. She managed to get herself free for an instant, found her keys, and went out into the street “with only whatever she had on.” The cold was cutting, Patagonian. She was a woman in danger.

She ran along Calle Lautaro exactly eighty-nine meters. She didn’t feel cold, despite the fact that she was only wearing a pair of animal print panties and a little green shift. He caught up with her crossing Monreal. On one side of the street there’s a two-story house made of stone and wood; on the other, a little tin shack where an old man lives alone, although he claims he didn’t hear anything. Nabila says she remembers the first blows, the kicks, the *combos*, and, finally a blow to the head. Later—many days afterward—she remembers the smell of the intensive care unit in the Posta Central hospital...and that strange darkness.

Nabila doesn’t know why she had the car keys with her; the police found them with her frozen, bloodied body. She doesn’t even know how to drive. Some doctors held the opinion that they were what Ortega used to gouge out her eyes. Others think he did it with his fingers. They all agree that he was far from an expert in the process.

¶

The following Monday, the feminist women called for a rally in the central plaza. They got it filled to capacity. From there they marched to the military headquarters of the *carabineros*, right across from the Investigative Police offices. The authorities already had Ortega under investigation. A young man was having a party with some friends in his own house on Calle Monreal. From his room, a kind of balcony on the top floor, he could see the street corner, where a man had a woman on the ground who was screaming like a drunk. When he saw the guy take off, he ran to catch the patrol car he had seen passing by without stopping. He saw her bleeding, saw the empty eye sockets, and got scared. He returned to his house and called the *carabineros*. The call was recorded. In it one feels the tension of the moment. It was 6:02 am. At 6:06 am two officials found Nabila. They couldn’t believe it, but she was still breathing. They had an eyewitness, but he didn’t identify Ortega.

On Wednesday a key witness appeared: a neighborhood worker who, at six o’clock sharp had left his house. He saw Nabila running, screaming while she ran. And he saw Ortega pursuing her. “It was the auto body guy,” he said. The man walked around the block the back way, and when he was on Lautaro—one street further up—he saw the same scene: “They were the auto body people.” He was hitting her with a couple of cement blocks. With these two eyewitnesses, the prosecutor sought the arrest of Ortega. In a short time he will be tried with all this evi-

dence and will undoubtedly be convicted of attempted feminicide and for double mutilation. All in all, the minimum sentence would be twenty years.



It's hard to find anyone who talks about Ortega. After Nabila's declaration, the opinions in Coyhaique were divided. There are those who believe he was just another feminicidal maniac, another Patagonian macho who believed he was the owner of a woman's body. And there are others who continue to think that it was more a matter of pure evil, a mafia of sex traffickers led by Nancy Navarro, the owner of the Acapulco, who is being prosecuted for bringing women from Colombia to Chile to work in her cabaret. On Monday, at one o'clock in the morning, she is there in her torn jeans, just over a meter and a half tall, stirring up the atmosphere at her establishment—a wooden shack with only a few tables, and even fewer clients. Her "restaurant" has been on this same corner for forty-two years. She inherited the business from her mother, and she's planning on leaving it to her daughter, who is tending to the drunks at the bar despite the obvious bulge in her belly from being eight months pregnant. "Ortega usually came here and got so drunk that he would fall asleep on top of the tables."

Tonight there are two Colombian prostitutes at the Acapulco. One comes over for a farewell kiss on the cheek and to ask for the keys—she's going to take care of a client. When she bids her adieu she says: "Thanks, mommy."

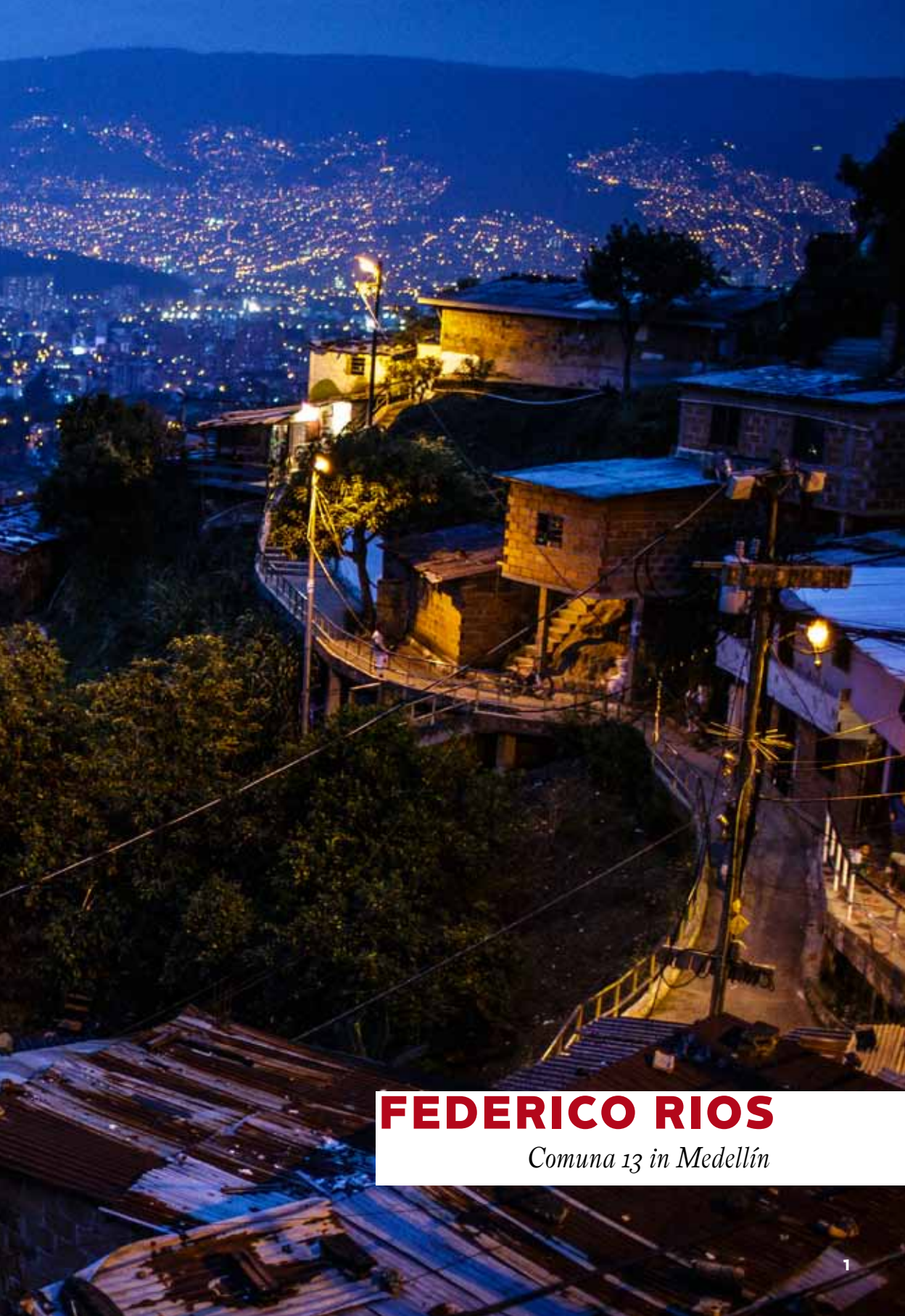
That's what the girls at the Acapulco call her: "Mamma."

Mariza Romero mentioned it at the start of this voyage.

"What everyone laments about Nabila's blindness isn't that she isn't ever going to see the world anymore; it's that she can't see her children."



The last Sunday it finally snowed in Coyhaique and over the whole region of Aysén. No one knows where Nabila is living now. The State has lent her a house in a secret location while her mother's shack is being enlarged. Wherever she is, though, at least she ought to have awakened with her four children. And wherever that place is, that's where they must have told her about what is happening in Coyhaique, beyond her window pane. Maybe she was able to make it by herself from the bedroom to the kitchen. Perhaps, in time, she'll be able to move through the space using all her senses—and that cane she used to tell her truth in court. Perhaps, in time, she'll be seen walking through her cold and smoky city, together with the women who went out into the streets to cry in her name. Because, after all, she's not listed in that mural in front of the prison: death was not able to write her name. Nabila lives, and perhaps today, in this snow, she is putting some firewood in the stove to help shake off the cold and the blues.



FEDERICO RIOS

Comuna 13 in Medellín







3. *The neighborhoods are besieged by the police and the army, but these have proved insufficient to stop the wars being waged. The victims of the gang wars are generally residents of the neighborhoods who are involved in the conflict, but members of law enforcement have also become a target of the gangs.*



4. *The authorities have documented more than four hundred illegal groups. Around half of them are active and have recruited some five thousand members.*

1. *Medellín has often been described as one of the most violent cities in Latin America. Recently, the city has undergone a process of transformation and has been recognized as an example of development and inclusion. But this may be a mirage. In the poorer comunas, a different reality is palpable: gang wars over the control of the drug trade.*

2. *A group of soldiers watching from the upper part of the neighborhood. It is not common for the criminal groups to confront the forces of order head on. But the military has established several bases in the territory and this has led to battles waged with military weaponry.*

The comunas of Medellín are marginalized neighborhoods where dealing in drugs and firearms have taken over a large sector of the community. In Comuna 13, criminal gangs devote most of their time to vigilance, doing the rounds of the territory in order to keep their enemies out. From the rooftops, these improvised guards monitor activity in the entire comuna.

In recent years, Comuna 13 has become a site of constant confrontations between rival gangs. Children begin to handle firearms before they are ten years old and many turn into experienced hired guns, with several murders to their credit, by the time they reach adolescence.

The options for getting ahead for the rest of the community are minimal: people cannot leave their neighborhoods, being confined by imaginary lines known as “invisible borders”: whoever crosses into enemy territory puts his or her life at risk.



5. *Inside the neighborhood, the soldiers are vulnerable, because of the intricate tangle of alleyways. The poorer comunas are labyrinths of brick, in constant expansion. Sometimes the forces of order have great difficulty patrolling on the little streets, which are dominated by the gangs. The entire neighborhood is laid out on an informal basis.*



6. *Two gang members , hidden in a window, watch the movements of their enemies across the street. Every movement by the gangs must take two aims into account: attacking the enemy and not being caught by the authorities.*

7. *A man crouching down with his weapon. Comuna 13 in Medellín has become the site of constant confrontations between rival gangs in recent years.*







8. *In these neighborhoods, everyone knows everything, but no one betrays the gang for fear of reprisals. The rules are simple. “No one hears or sees anything, Live and let live.” Often the communities themselves seem to think that the criminal groups provide them with safety.*

9. *By the time they become teenagers, many young people are armed and have committed several murders. The gangs provide guns to the smalltime drug dealers, who use them to protect their business from illegal taxes.*

10. *She was displaced by violence in the countryside and he was abandoned by his family when he was a baby. Now they are a couple and work together for a gang in Comuna 13.*

11. *In the neighborhood, the price of a gram of perico (coke) is less than a dollar fifty.*



9



10







12. *A man with a tattoo alluding to gang life on his neck.*



13. *The daily lives of the gang members are as dangerous as they are tedious. They spend most of their time doing the rounds and making decisions to keep other gangs out of their territory. The rest of the time is spent getting high in safe houses.*



14. *A drug dealer smokes a joint to help get him through the night.*



15. *A group of gang members play videogames in the basement of one of their hideouts. In spite of free public education, most gang members have not finished high school.*



MARÍA FERNANDA AMPUERO

Manabí Breathes

“ The earthquake in Chile on February 27th, 2010, one of the ten worst in history, registered 8.8 on the Richter scale. ”

“Breathe and sing. Where everything ends, open your wings.”

Blanca Varela

Imagine that it is the weekend of your birthday, in the springtime, and you are in Paris. Imagine that in the hostel, every morning, they hang a bag of freshly-baked croissants from the doorknob of your room. You have slept well and are eager to begin the day. Then you read the message from Eileen, from the United States, and Eileen asks if your family is all right and writes the word: earthquake. Imagine that you are ten thousand kilometers away and someone tells you there has been an earthquake on the coast of Ecuador. Which is to say: at home.

Imagine imagining that everyone is dead.

Until you are able to make contact—because communications are down and there is no electricity—the world explodes in your head.

Finally, the voice of your mother:

“We’re all fine.”

“And in Manabí?”

“...”

“Mom, what’s happening in Manabí?”

I

In Manabí, one of the Ecuadorian provinces bathed by the Pacific, it is generally very hot. But Portoviejo, its capital, is a veritable inferno. The sun is such a psychopath, such a sonofabitch, that you feel, after spending just a while outside, that you could lose consciousness. This is not an irrelevant fact. There, baking under the fury of the solar disk, are hundreds of people who lost their homes on Saturday, April 16th, 2016, a date we no longer have

to specify, a date that is understood: the day the earth went crazy.

Now you are under the sun you hate so much, two months after the earthquake that registered 8.7 on the Richter scale, with its epicenter here, in Manabí. You have arrived at the Reina del Camino bus terminal in Portoviejo. A man is selling candies to travelers, coconut and peanut candies from Rocafuerte, famous all over Ecuador. The buses are arriving and departing. Everything seems normal.

Zoilita Sornosa, your host—soon it will be Mamá Portoviejo—arrives and the first thing she says is: “I don’t even recognize the city anymore.” Taking you along a few streets in her car, she shows you that nothing here will ever be as it was. Portoviejo will need to be remade.

Imagine a town after a bombardment: buildings in ruins, held up by some miracle of equilibrium, empty shells where there used to be hotels or shopping centers, cracks big enough to swallow a motorcycle, and the entire downtown cordoned off, empty, silent, phantasmal. Imagine that hundreds of bombs have fallen all in one place. Imagine a kind of destruction that persists. You would prefer not to look, but you look. You would prefer not to say Oh my God, but you say Oh my God. You would prefer not to remember that one hundred and forty people died in Portoviejo, according to official figures. But you remember. You won’t stop remembering.



The earthquake in Chile on February 27th, 2010, one of the ten worst in history, registered 8.8 on the Richter scale. It has been calculated that the energy liberated that day was equivalent to ten thousand atomic bombs.

The earthquake in Ecuador registered a magnitude of 7.8. When you look at the center of the capital of Manabí province, all that stuff about atomic bombs is perfectly understandable.



On the runway of what was going to be the Portoviejo airport, 1,191 people—320 families—live in 229 tents set up through international cooperation, mainly that of the UNHCR. The runway is of black asphalt, designed for airplanes, not for children or families, so from eleven in the morning to four in the afternoon, the temperatures are unbearable. The ground scorches. The tents, designed to provide shelter, turn into torture chambers: ‘sauna’ is the word most often heard around them. But also ‘inferno.’ And ‘oven.’ And

‘die.’ That is why the most sought-after place is the lunch tent: enormous, communal, like a party tent. Because of the roof, yes, but also because of the two flat-screen televisions, side by side, where you can watch soccer, on one, and the afternoon soap opera on the other. Running around between the tables—red plastic beach tables—are children of all ages. One of them has a stuffed toy and for a moment projects an idyllic image: a little boy hugging his teddy bear. Until he begins to use it, choking with laughter, to hit the other children. At one table, the one next to a post with some electrical outlets, some men seem to be doing business, but in fact they are playing cards. At another, an older man in an unbuttoned green shirt is yawning. Several women of different ages in bright-colored dresses—in the area that seems to be a matriarchy—are talking about the day’s soap opera. Two adolescent girls and a woman of around thirty are coddling a baby in a baby carriage. If you don’t think about it, that is, if you don’t think that all these people have lost their homes, their businesses, even their loved ones, all this might have a certain festive air. The children decide to change the tv channel from soccer. A tall, dark-skinned soldier in an olive green uniform, with a face and voice by no means festive, tells them:

“This television is not yours.”

The children run away and the military man remains guarding the television.

Dinner hour approaches. The smell of frying is like a bell that raises up the entire camp. More and more people arrive. The meal puts people in a good mood. The fact is that, in Manabí, when people eat, they talk about food, and when they don’t eat, they fantasize about past and future meals. In Manabí, as all Ecuador knows, people don’t eat to live, but quite the contrary.

¶

“The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places.”

Ernest Hemingway

¶

It turns out you have a cousin in Manabí you have never met. His name is Diego. The *manabitas* speak very quickly, dropping some syllables, drawing out others, like a race with the tongue. Cousin Diego belongs to the Fer-

rari stable: he speaks more quickly than anyone, and three out of every five words are swear words. He makes you laugh. It is easy to love cousin Diego, who says:

“I’ve got a buddy who has family in Pedernales. He says we should go there tomorrow. All this shit is just ground zero. As fucked up as can be, I’ll tell you that.”

¶

Pedernales is a canton in the province of Manabí. It has a little over 50,000 inhabitants, almost all of whom making a living from tourism, in this region where the beaches and the Pacific Ocean are postcard perfect. In Pedernales the seismic movement was so strong—like the shaking of a monstrous tentacle—that seven hundred buildings (70% of the total) were destroyed. According to official figures, 184 people died, though local residents say that more, many more, were buried without record, in their haste to deal with the bodies pulled out from under tons of cement, which were beginning to smell and to contaminate. The survivors say the worst thing was living for days and days with the stench of rotting flesh. The most common description is that Pedernales smelled of death.

Since then, sixty days have passed and all you see is rubble. Where there used to be hotels with ocean views: piles of rubble and empty lots. Where there were shops, houses, or restaurants: piles of earth. It is like a return to the past: a little village. From the highway you can see the ocean. It can be seen from everywhere. They say that in Pedernales, ever since the 1980s, the ocean could only be seen when you got right up to it.

On Saturday, April 16th, 2016, at 6:58 p.m., Erik Sabando, 37 years old, very black eyes, dark skin marked by acne, head almost completely shaved, was supposed to be taking a nap in the hotel where he lived, before going out for the night. But just after 6:00 p.m. some friends called him: he had taken the grinder and they needed it to prepare some marijuana. Erik got up reluctantly and willingly at the same time. He was feeling lazy, but he wanted to smoke. He arrived, they ground up some weed, and he decided to stay.

Erik’s grinder was on a round black plastic table, which looked like it was for outside use. Next to it was a saucer, decorated with a Turkish design, containing a few shreds of tobacco and a half-finished joint.

The grinder is a round instrument of transparent plastic, very scratched

and worn. Erik never stops repeating how it saved his life, giving it a couple of taps with his index finger. He asks you to take a photo. No, not of him, of the grinder. What happened is that Erik's hotel was completely leveled: he lost everything, but not his life, because he was at his friend Julio's place, a simple, one-storey cement house, solid and steady, very near to the ocean, the only one on its block, and one of the few in the zone, that remained standing. Now Erik lives there, puts his grinder on the black plastic table, and tells you about the earthquake.

"There we were, El Nariz, Julio, his wife, and I. Then I felt those pieces of cane on the patio start to move. I was on a chair outside, formatting the computer. I looked at the clock: 6:57. That's when it started. The earth started to groan horribly. The movement made everyone fall down. People were like zombies. The sound was like all hell breaking loose. You couldn't walk, you would fall down, as when your knees double. It was the end of the world. Then you heard 'Help! Help!' but you didn't have the guts to go and help. The power went off. We hugged each other and prayed. It was as if we were being bombed. The policemen were shouting 'Tsunami!' There were ten people in that hotel (he points to a nearby lot filled with debris). Five got out and five remained buried under the rubble. Dead. It all happened in a minute: five dead and five alive. Just like that. I remember it was a beautiful night, like in those religious paintings you see, of the end of the world: a beautiful moon and then suddenly it started to rain. We were afraid of the tsunami, but we also said: 'If we leave, there will be nothing left tomorrow.' And so we stayed. From eight in the evening until two in the morning I slept: I don't know how, but I slept. Afterwards no one could sleep anymore, no one can sleep anymore. The neighbors themselves were pulling their dead neighbors out of the rubble. International aid? It stayed up in the hills. To see how it all was the next day... (he is silent for a long time). It was all just razed. I had my grinder and my wallet, nothing else, but I'm alive. A cousin of mine and two nephews were killed. What did it hurt most to lose, of my things? My shaving kit. It was a good one. They don't even have them in Santo Domingo. This gets infected (he points to his beard). I have to go to Quito and buy another one. I think I'm in a depression, acting a little wild: I feel confined, powerless, in limbo, like a sleepwalker. Seeing so much and not being able to do anything. The work of a lifetime lost in a minute. You go out and see all that and you just say 'What the fuck.'"



You choose a lot at random. You search among the rubble. You find a little girl's denim skirt and the sole of a black high heel shoe made in Ecuador. Albendazol 100 mg (an anti-parasite medicine), a half-full flask of hair gel, the book *En las calles* by Jorge Icaza, without its cover, a blue pencil box (Totto brand) that belonged to Brayan Darío Cagua Patiño, a yellow bead necklace, and a piece of paper with four lines on it, very torn and folded, on which someone has written some last names and beside them, the words paid or owe. In two of the corners of the paper, a pair of chapters and verses from the Bible: Isaiah 58:1 and John 10:10.

You look them up in the Bible:

Isaiah 58:1: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

John 10:10: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."



Galo Menéndez has come to Pedernales to look for his father. His father, who had been born and raised in the countryside, had never visited him. His father had the same name as he did: Galo Menéndez, and he is dead.

In the cemetery in Pedernales there are no trees, there is no shade. All the flowers are of discolored, sun-bleached plastic. There is the white of quicklime and grey. Period. Among the graves, Galo—who looks anywhere from sixty to eighty years old, because his skin (the skin of people who work the land), a parchment of lines and wrinkles, makes it impossible to be sure—is looking for his father. He walks slowly. The ground is cracked and broken. The names on the graves are difficult to decipher. He is not there: Galo Menéndez the elder does not appear, and the heat is like someone shouting in his ear, and sweat stains his yellowish shirt, which was once white but has been weathered, like him, over the years. Galo takes you by the arm and asks you to go a little further, to the mausoleum of someone who, even in death, wanted to mark a difference: he has a roof. Galo, in order to wipe his soaking forehead with his handkerchief, takes off his hat, the famous hat made in Ecuador to which they have given the name of another country: Panama. Though they are made here, in Montecristi. He calls the earthquake the "rapture" and tells you it was a punishment, a divine warning.

“This village is very corrupt: lots of bad things. That’s why the rapture came.”

Galo stops talking and an animal that looks like a large rat, a kind of agouti they call guatusa, scampers by a few centimeters from where he is standing and hides in a very old, brown, rotting coffin, which the earth surrendered up in April, when it decided to roll over: the rapture.

Galo says goodbye, puts on his hat, and goes back out into the sun, in search of his father.

In the graveyard there are new graves: those of April 16th. There is one that is just a whitewashed cement box on which someone has written in pencil:

I love you

Lots

Mamita

I will

Miss you

Sinc.

Veintimilla, Javier

:-(

I will miss you

Bros.

Veintimilla

my

mamita

shall live

4 ever

Arminda Martínez

(17/04/16)

:-(

Rest in peace



The walls of Pedernales are covered with graffiti.

“My heart is in Pedernales.”

“Pedernales we will stay to get you back on your feet.”

“Together we’ll lift you up.”

“Better days will come.”



La Chorrera was a paradise, they will tell you. A little village on a cove that lived from traditional fishing and, just recently, from tourists looking for something authentic: little houses of wood and cane, a forest full of birds and howler monkeys, boats on the beach. And you ate well there: every year they celebrated the shrimp and lobster festival. As you enter La Chorrera, just off the highway, there is Gloria María Moreira Valdez rocking herself in a hammock, with a bored face on. She looks at you. You look at her. You say hello to her. She says hello to you. She holds back the dogs with the martial tone of a retired captain:

“Muñequita! Ruffo! Top! Pigua!”

And they all remain motionless.

Gloria María is fifty-eight years old and very overweight. She suffers from diabetes and has trouble walking. To make it easier for her to go the bathroom, her husband, Frowen Inocencia Torales, came up with the idea of making a hole in a plastic chair that is kept right beside her hammock. She and all her relatives, that is, her mother Enedrina Margarita, her daughter Dioselina Natividad, and her grandchildren Daniela, Albert, and Jennifer, live on a lot at the start of the highway, which belongs, she tells you, to “a Mr. Arcentales,” and who, they say, will be returning next week to use it for his business: he makes fiber for boats. They do not know—Gloria María doesn’t know, and she seems to be the one who makes the decisions in the family—what they are going to do. She doesn’t even want to hear of returning to her home by the ocean.

Her home now is a makeshift settlement of mattresses, sheets serving as walls, a kitchen, a plastic table, cardboard boxes, some pieces of furniture she managed to salvage, bags into which they tried to stuff a lifetime, and the hammock. Some tents donated by the Islamic Republic of Iran provide a place to sleep for her mother, *doña* Enedrina, who is also unable to walk, and her brother-in-law Ángel Torales, who lost his daughter, his two granddaughters, and his pregnant daughter-in law, and who never leaves the tent.

“If it had caught us inside the house, we wouldn’t be here. We were on the beach: we got thoroughly soaked. Look, the earth was turning over like this (she moves her hands rapidly). The refrigerator went through the wall of the kitchen. The kitchen went through the bathroom. This whole little house just danced. We went two days without clothes. Out of luck. Oh, it was a very great sadness here. How can I say? As if an atomic bomb

had fallen. Like the end of the world. I have premonitions, I'll tell you, I'm afraid. We tried to return, but look what happened on May 18th (there was an aftershock registering 6.8 in the provinces of Manabí and Esmeraldas). No, I've taken a lot from the ocean, it's our staff of life, but no. It's no good here. You can't sleep with the noise of the cars, the rumbling of the trucks, but there's no other option. They say they're going to relocate us up there. At the top of that hill. Go and see: there's a little house up there".

The children take you to see the little house. It's beautiful, just like in a fairy tale. A house which—as Daniela, the eldest granddaughter, thirteen years old, tells you—everyone will supposedly be able to buy with the ten-thousand-dollar loans the government is going to give. The model house, the one we see, is still being built. The children speak of the horror of the earthquake in a different way, both more grisly and more sincere. Daniela says that the impact of the beam that killed her cousin's wife, eight months pregnant, split her open and you could see the baby. Albert, eight years old, looks at his sister attentively. The cousin, the widower, whom they call Ito, has tried to commit suicide twice already. They don't use the word 'suicide.' They just say he goes very fast on his motorcycle, has an accident, ends up in the clinic, and then doesn't speak or get out of bed.

323



The trip back to Portoviejo is made in silence. The highway, broken, uneven, and creviced from the earthquake, makes it necessary to zigzag. The bumps are constant: as if you were riding a horse. You see big trucks passing loaded with broken doors, pieces of zinc roof, twisted iron, crooked beams, deformed, often unrecognizable, construction elements: scrap for the scrapyard.

You try to talk about sex, drinking bouts, ghost stories. You end up talking about people who were having sex in motels when the earthquake struck and went out onto the street naked and terrified; about people who were drunk during the earthquake and later asked "What earthquake?"; about earthquake ghosts, with candles in their hands, looking for the way to the great beyond but trapped forever in the center of Portoviejo.



"Three days ago I came back to my home in Valparaíso, after being away a long time. Huge cracks in the walls were just like wounds. Disheartening

rugs of shattered glass covered the floors of the rooms. The clocks, also on the floor, grimly recorded the time of the earthquake. How many lovely things Matilde's broom was now sweeping up from the floor; how many rare objects the earth's tremors had turned into trash. // We have to clean up, to put things back, and start all over again. Paper is hard to find in the middle of the mess; and then, it's hard to collect one's thoughts. // My last work was a translation of *Romeo and Juliet* and a long love poem in archaic meter, a poem that was never completed. // Come on, love poem, get up from among the broken glass, the time to sing has come. // Help me, love poem, to make things whole again, to sing in spite of pain. // It's true that the world does not cleanse itself of wards, does not wash off the blood, does not get over its hate. It's true. // Yet it is equally true that we are moving toward a realization: the violent ones are reflected in the mirror of the world, and their faces are not pleasant to look at, not even to themselves. // And I go on believing in the possibility of love. I am convinced that there will be mutual understanding among human beings, achieved in spite of all the suffering, the blood, the broken glass."

Pablo Neruda, "Broken Glass," *Memoirs [Confieso que he vivido]*

¶

"We are just thinking about getting back on our feet."

This is said to you, from behind her desk, by Betty Muñoz, one of the heirs to the largest funeral home operation in Manabí, Santa Marianita, with three funeral parlors in Manta and two in Portoviejo. All around her, coffins, coffins, and more coffins. Some of them shining, others opaque, some of very large, with dark wood and elaborate silver ornamentation, crucifixes or clasps, others much simpler, white and very small, for children. The funeral home even has some coffins decorated with the flag and colors of the Liga Deportiva Universitaria de Portoviejo and of Emelec, two national soccer teams. The one with the colors of the Barcelona Sporting Club, Betty tells you, was already sold. Before speaking of the earthquake, or in order to avoid doing so, Betty examines her nails, polished and very well cared for, like the rest of her appearance. In Ecuador, the women of Manabí have the reputation of being the most beautiful in the country. Betty has long glossy black hair gathered into a bun, she is carefully made up, and is wearing black heels. Her clothes are perhaps a little tight, since she is not slender, but it suits her. She is definitely pretty. She doesn't want to cry and

she doesn't cry. But, in order to escape her emotions, she often pauses and conceals what she feels. For example, she prefers not to speak of the other funeral parlor, her own, which was lost, crushed by the Marujita Hostel, which was beside it and collapsed in the earthquake. Nor can she explain what was going through her head the entire month she spent in bed, with the curtains drawn, with no desire to go anywhere. She shakes her head.

"My mother has done this all her life, for more than thirty-five years now. We always had a room in the funeral parlor where we could have lunch or do our homework. We spent all our time there. The business of our entire family is death: it's normal. One of my sons is studying embalming, and my daughter does mortuary cosmetics, making up and grooming the corpses. She leaves them beautiful. Death has never caused me fear or sadness, because it's a part of life. We see it as something natural. But the earthquake... That was... I went out, I don't know how, and looked straight ahead: everything around me had fallen down, and I looked straight ahead and screamed until I lost my voice. I think of all the people who have died. We have seen so much pain. My mother could have died: she was in the basement preparing one of the deceased for a vigil and the building collapsed. I don't know how they got her out alive. God watched over us with compassion. Now we are just thinking about getting back on our feet."

325

From posters on the walls of Portoviejo:

"Robert's Bakery is now at its new location in the Ciudadela Municipal, near the Redondel Monument to Agriculture."

"This is the new Manabí!"

"La Carreta is open as usual."

"Laurita's Spice Shop: come on in."

"Chelita's Bakery, following the fateful 16/A, is serving as usual at its new location."

"The former things are passed away.' Revelation 21:4."

"Learn to appreciate what you have, before time teaches you to appreciate what you had."

"We overcame because we overcame: Manabí strength."

"From Portoviejo, with an iron will."

"7.8 knocked down Portoviejo: 300,000 iron souls will raise it up."

"*El sanduchazo*: we will raise you back up together, Portoviejo."



The policemen are young and wear face masks. They have been brought from all over the country. On every corner of downtown Portoviejo there are at least two of them. Everything is closed off. It's a city in ruins. You go up to pet a cat on a chair and discover that the chair is the policemen's, but not the cat. Or it wasn't, but it's sticking to them now. Also a dog with brown and white spots. A plastic container on the ground, which the dog is scratching to get the last scrap out of, could be the explanation of the strong link between them. Both animals have to admit it: they are given food by the policemen. Who knows whose they were, maybe their owners died, so now it's the policemen who guard the corner where the Portoviejo Fire Station used to be, before it collapsed. Two policemen, still almost teenagers, one from the coast and one from the highlands, a spotted dog, and a black cat. Around them, as far as the eye can see, the end of the world.



Every morning, Zoilita, Mamá Portoviejo, prepares a Manabí breakfast. With green plantain, that is. Which is to say, delicious. The day arrives with a green smell. One afternoon, Zoilita announces that she has gotten some good pork rind and tomorrow she will make *bolones*, green plantain dumplings. You close your eyes. Manabí is where your grandfather was from. The paradise your mother told you about. You are here. And more importantly, Manabí is here. That announcement, so simple: there will be green plantain dumplings for breakfast. In the middle of all this, it is as if they had pulled you out of the water after a long, long time, and said: "Breathe."

You breathe.



"I knew that some of my inventory had survived, I don't know why: just the hope you never give up. I said: my good inventory has to still be there. Yes, I lost a part, but that doesn't matter. The important thing is that we're alive, on our feet again, in this daily struggle to make a living. And we are still in Portoviejo: we're not leaving. You know we have to keep all this going, above all for the family, but also for ourselves and for the city: we have to keep going."

Wilden Macías, fifty-three years old, thirty-three of which have been spent in the retail trade, is wearing the jersey of the Ecuadorian national soccer team, because today, June 16th, exactly two months after the earthquake, there is an America Cup game and he is convinced Ecuador will win against their opponent the United States. The store, where he sells watches, knapsacks, irons, telephones, is called Roxana's because that is the name of his ex-wife and, although, the marriage ended, the name, he tells himself, still carries a certain prestige among the clientele. It's not the only thing of his ex-wife's that is still close to him. The original store was in a shopping center right at ground zero. It was destroyed. So the new location, which has just been open for a month, is in the garage of his ex-father-in-law, Roxana's father.

"My father-in-law—I still call him my father-in-law—told me it was mine, to do whatever I wanted with the space. So one of my sisters lent me five hundred, a friend two hundred, my father-in-law a little something more, and I was able to do it. This has been an effort by everyone. The support has been incredible, incredible. Because look, Portoviejo is a clearly commercial city and people live from commerce: we know that if we don't work, we don't eat. Now we are scattered about, but the downtown won't die. You know that we manabitas are very positive. They say the best soldier is the one who just keeps getting up again. Well, we have gotten up again and again."



Imagine that you are in Portoviejo and Zoilita has said goodnight and has said my little girl and the lights go out, one after another. Imagine that it's your last night in Manabí and even Max, crazy, furry, loving Max, Mamá Portoviejo's dog, has gone to sleep, tired of barking at shadows, at the wind.

Imagine that you wake up, as you did a few days ago, with the banging and knocking and humming of hundreds of hammers, drills, screwdrivers, perforators, saws. The soundtrack of reconstruction, screeching, groaning, deafening.

Imagine that the strident sounds of the city being rebuilt are something like the *Ode to Joy* for you.

And Zoilita is making green plantain dumplings for breakfast.

You're in Manabí.

Breathe.



1. *On the way to Santiago de Cuba*

DARÍO CORTÉS

La Havana







3. *Havana*



4. *Havana*



5. *Havana*







7. Havana



8. Old Havana



9. *Havana*



10. *Cuba*







12. Santiago de Cuba



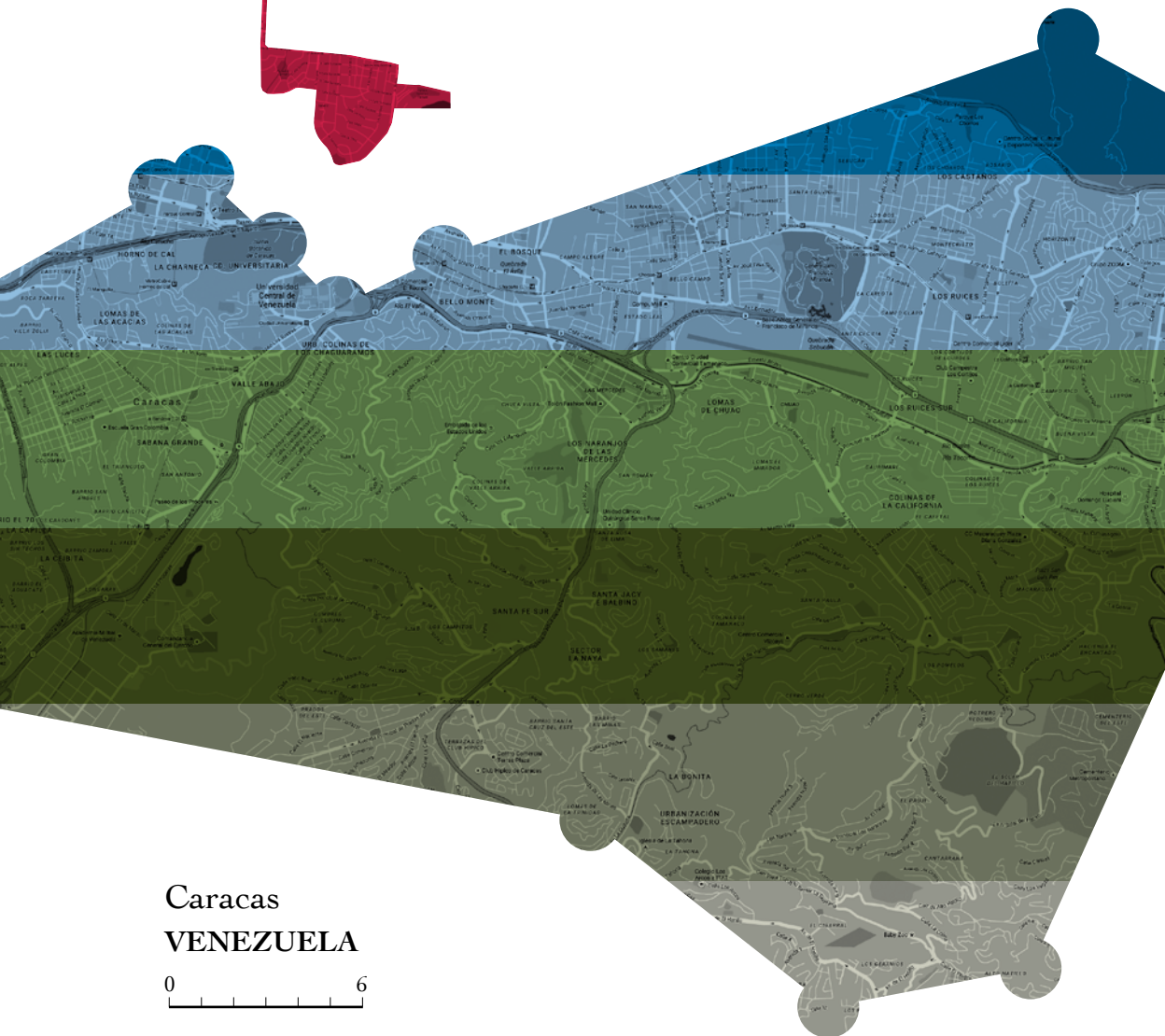
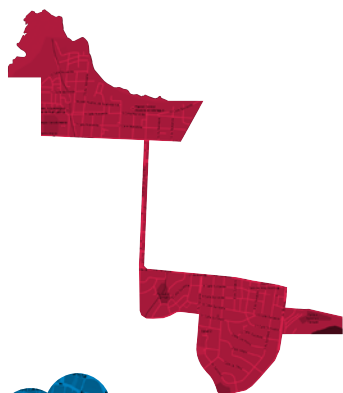




Managua

NICARAGUA

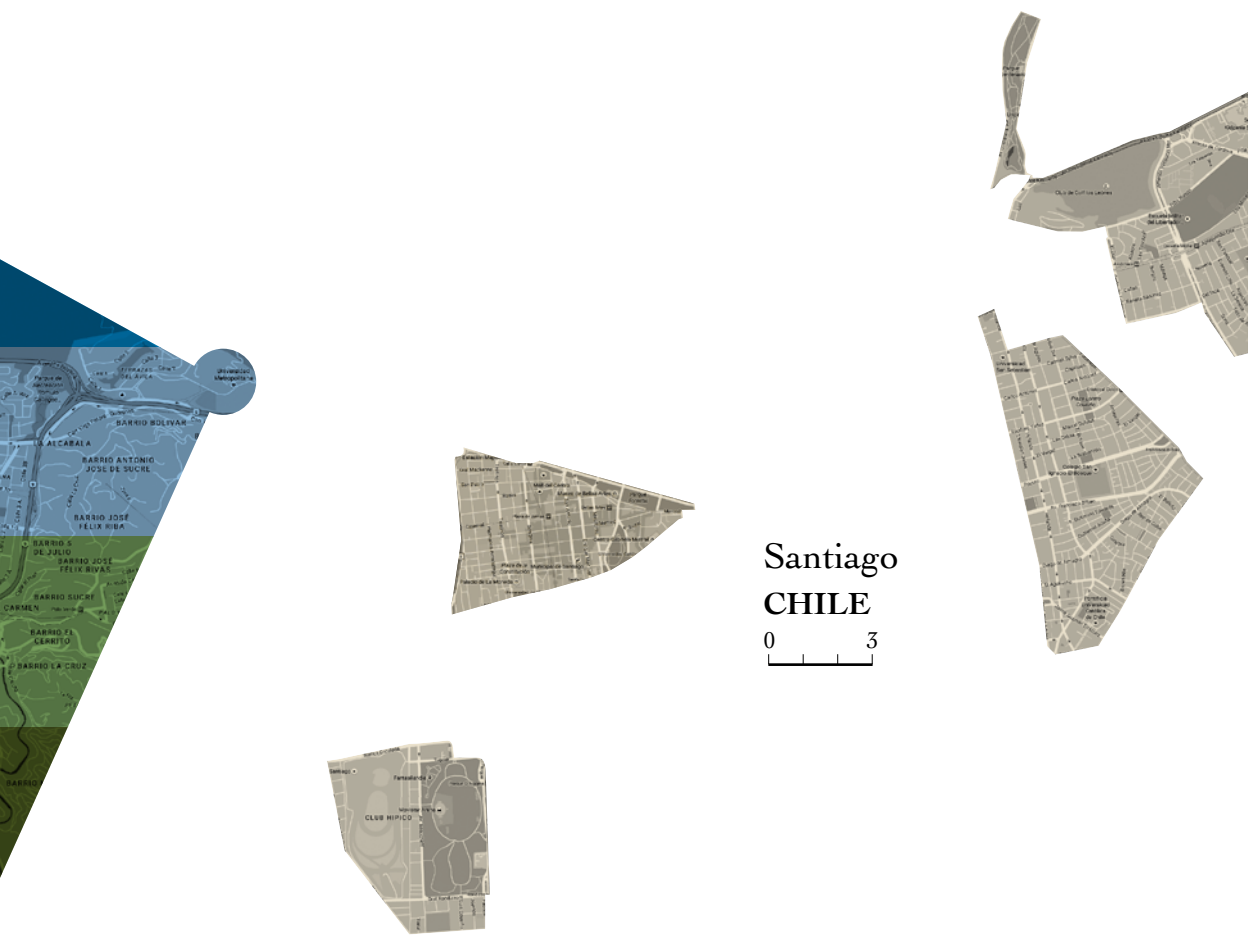
0 5



Caracas

VENEZUELA

0 6



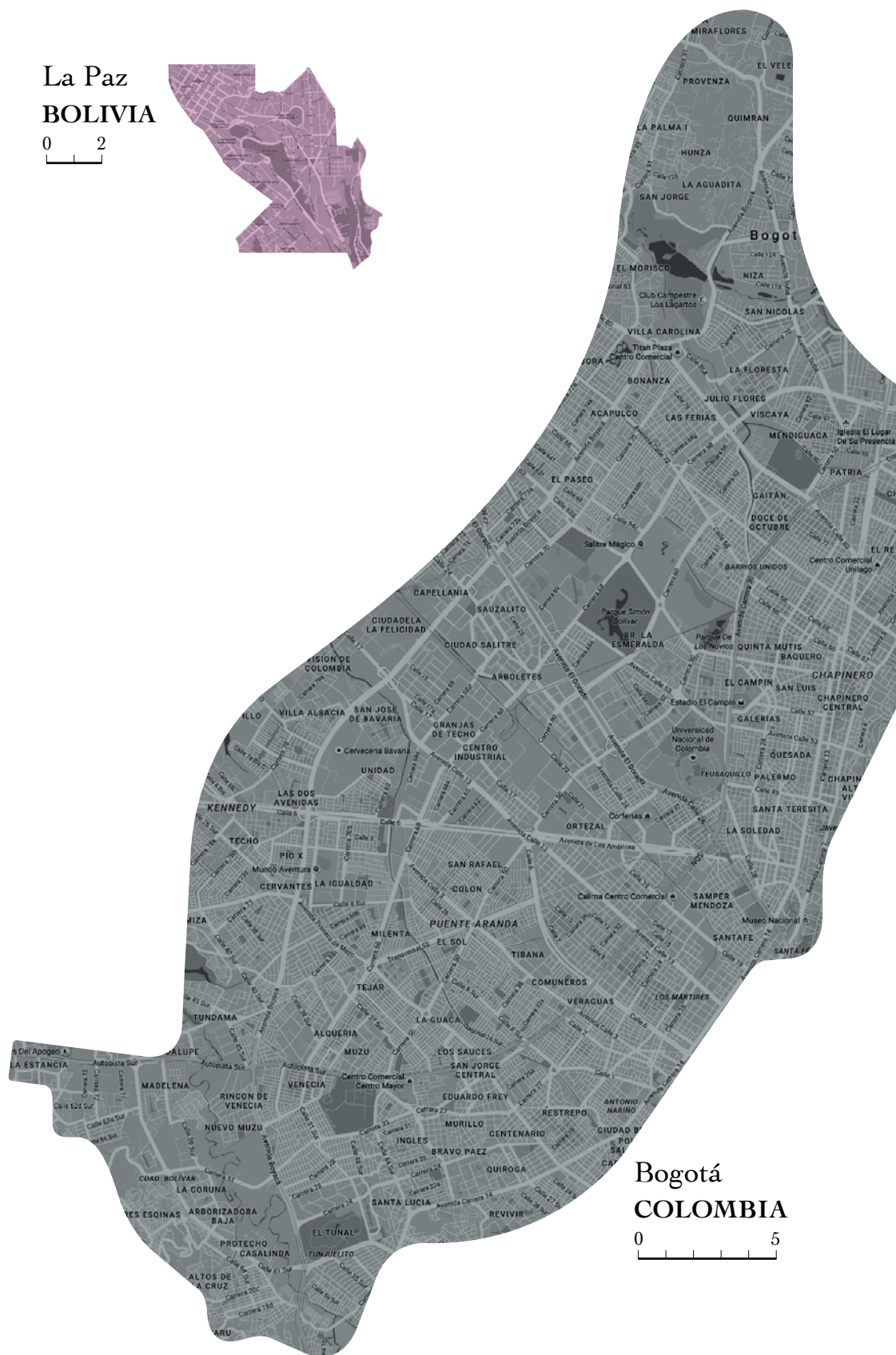
Santiago CHILE

0 3

São Paulo
BRASIL



A horizontal number line with arrows at both ends. There are three tick marks. The first tick mark on the left is labeled '0'. The third tick mark on the right is labeled '2'. The second tick mark, located exactly halfway between 0 and 2, is not labeled.



Bogotá
COLOMBIA

A horizontal number line with arrows at both ends. There are six major tick marks labeled 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from left to right. There are also four minor tick marks between each pair of major tick marks, dividing each unit into five equal parts.

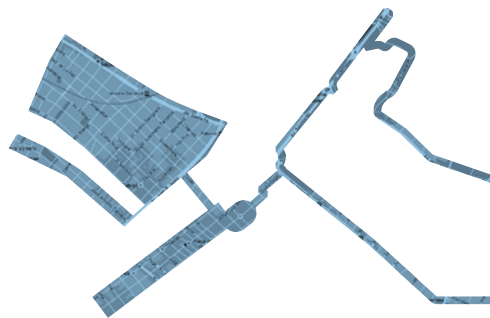
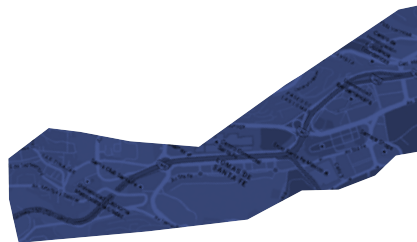


A horizontal number line with arrows at both ends. There are five major tick marks labeled 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 from left to right. The line is divided into four equal segments by these tick marks.





Guatemala
GUATEMALA



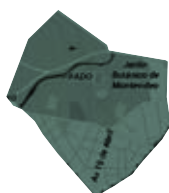
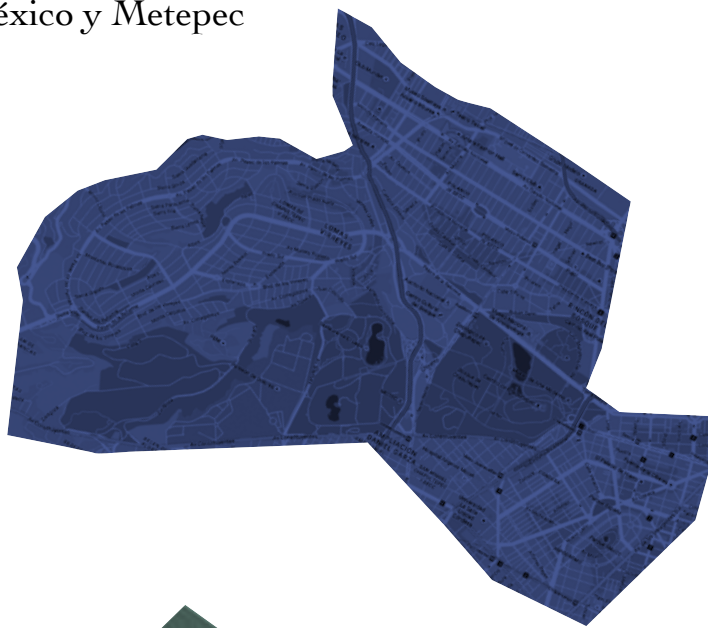
Buenos Aires
ARGENTINA



Ciudad de México y Metepec

MÉXICO

0 3

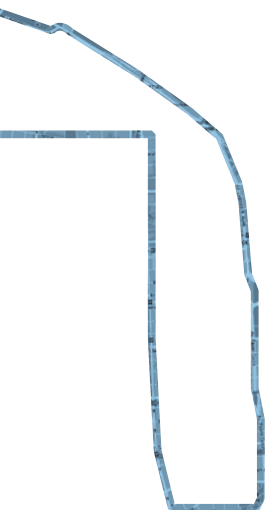


351

Montevideo

URUGUAY

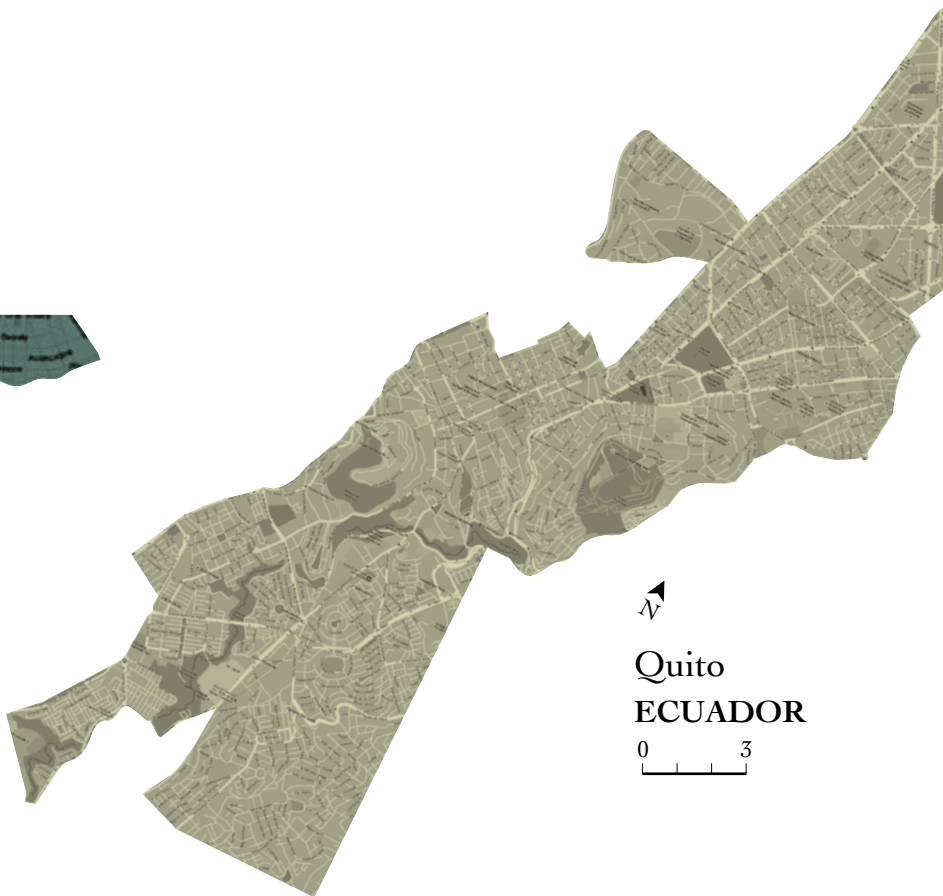
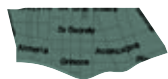
0 4





Tegucigalpa
HONDURAS

0 5



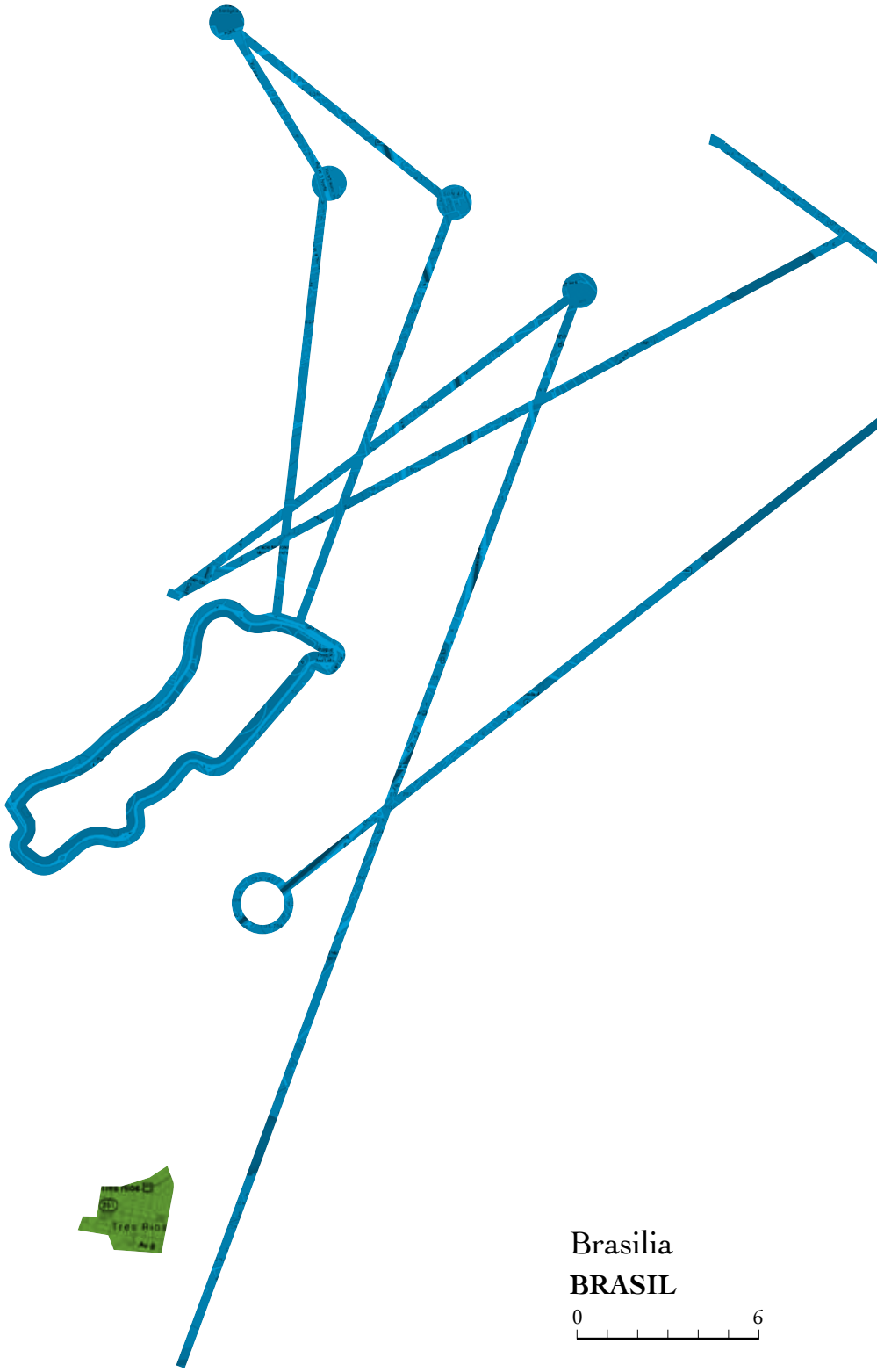
Quito
ECUADOR

0 3



San José
COSTA RICA



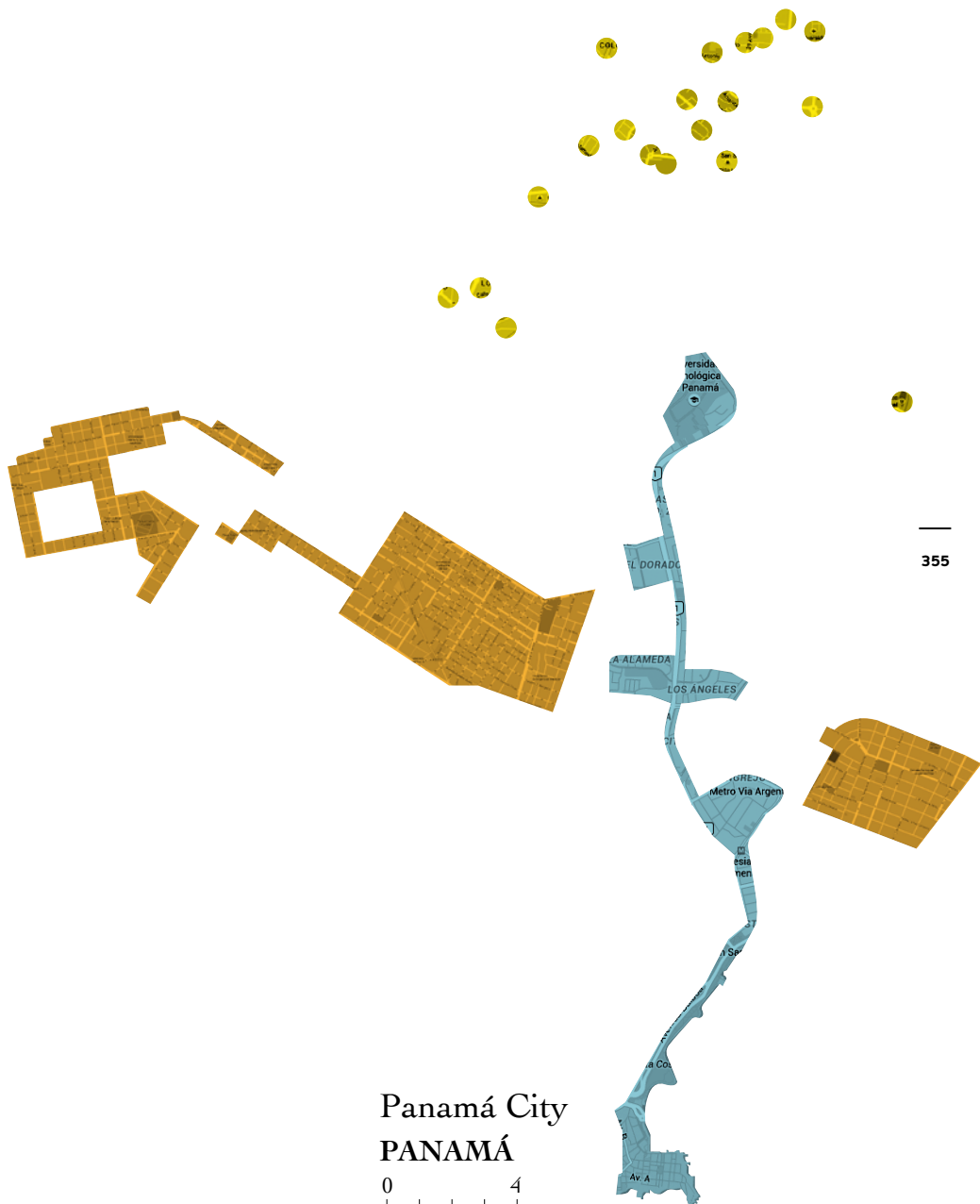


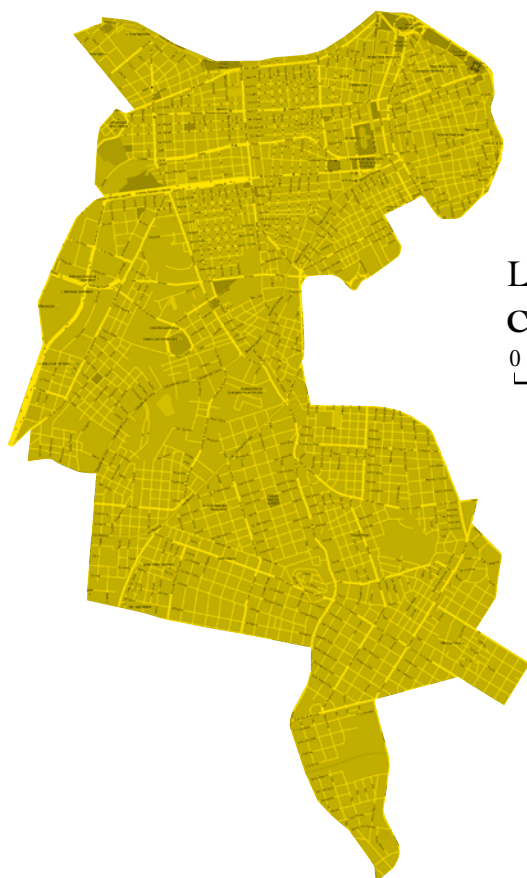
Brasilia
BRASIL



San Salvador EL SALVADOR

0
1





La Habana

CUBA

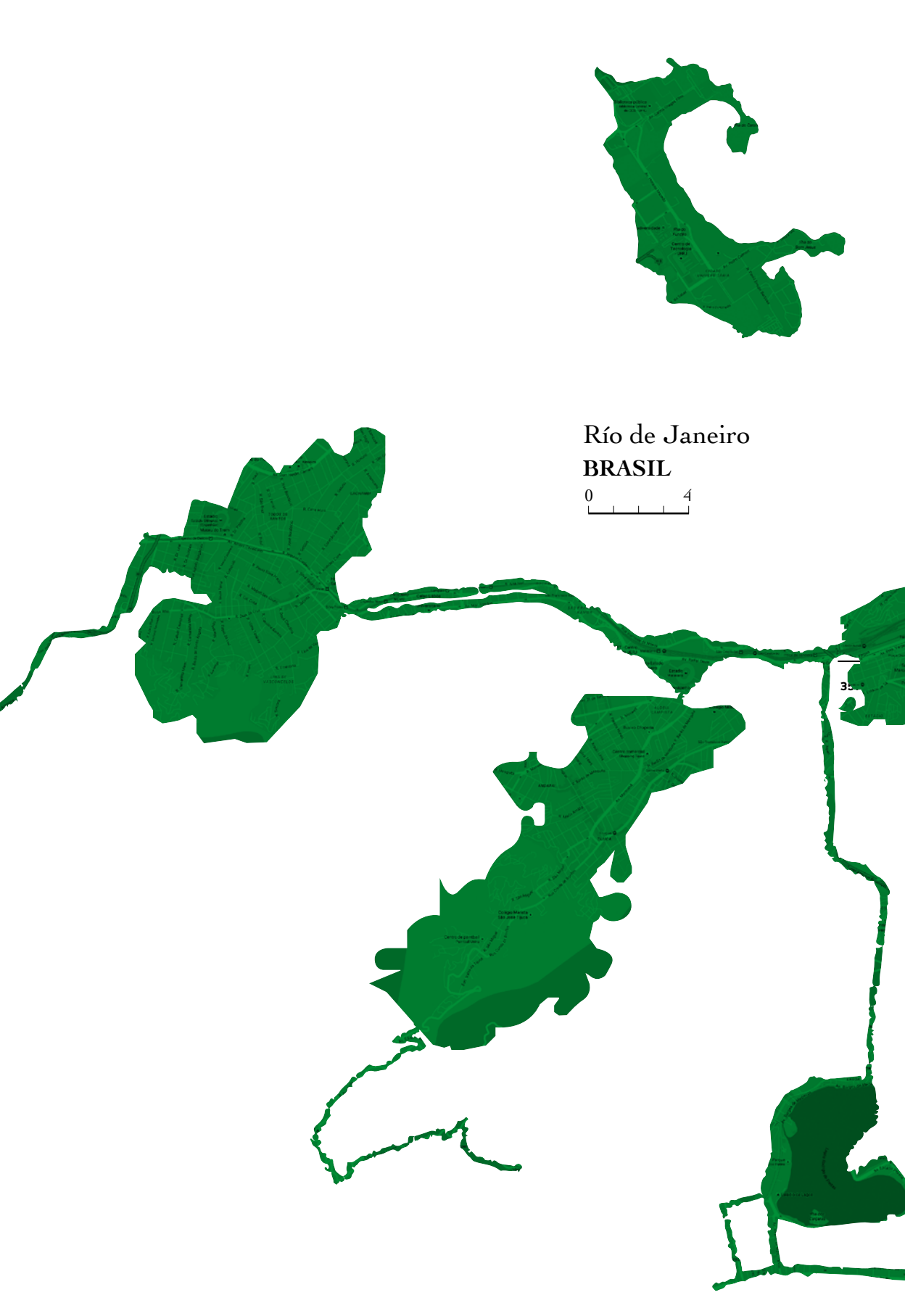
0 1



Asunción

PARAGUAY

0 5



Río de Janeiro
BRASIL



35

Duque de Caixas (Río de Janeiro)

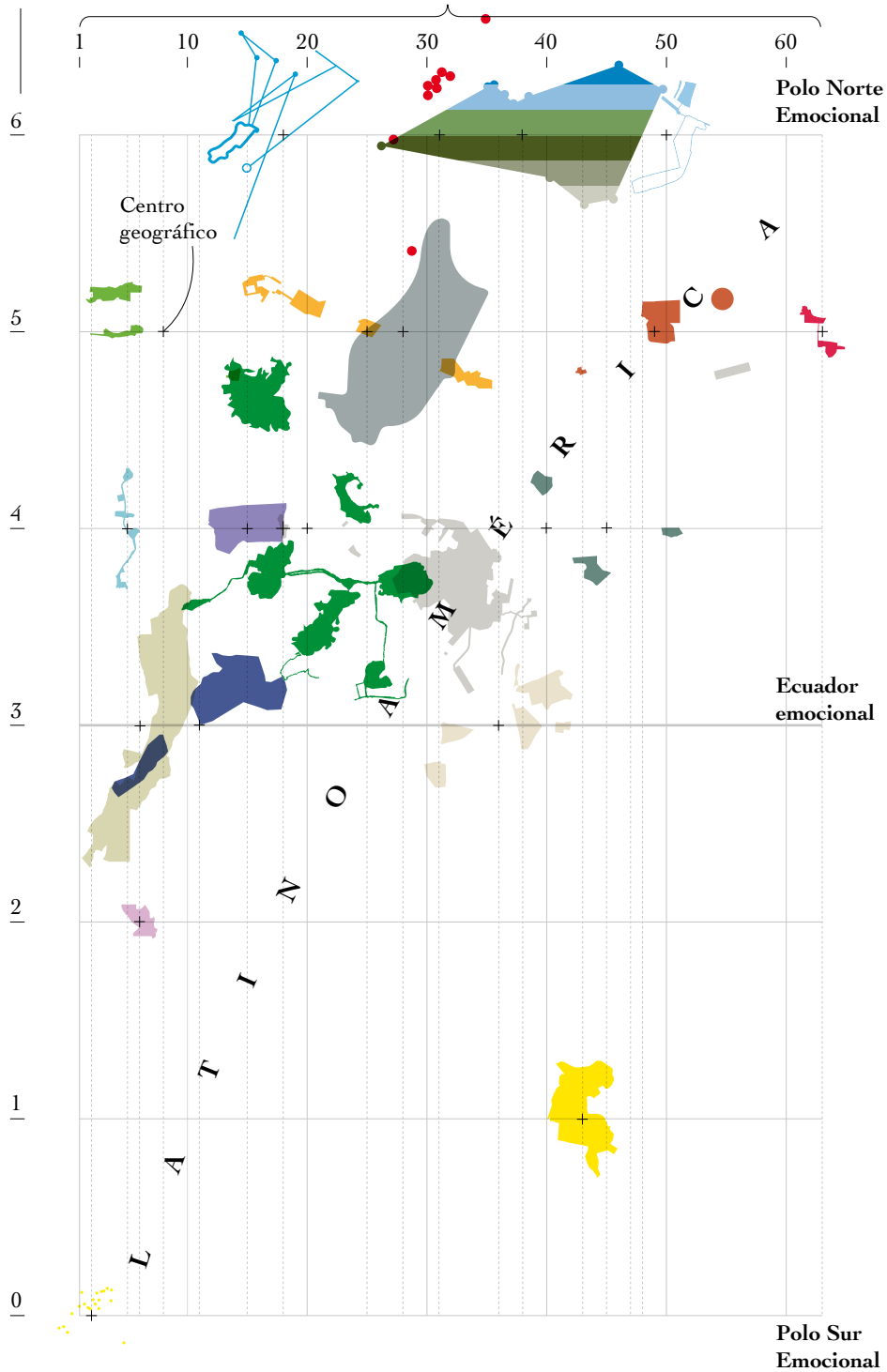


Lima
PERÚ



Paralelos emocionales
(en percepción)

Meridianos vivenciales
(en años)



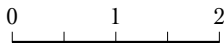
ÁTLAS VIVENCIAL DE AMÉRICA LATINA

Se le pidió a dieciocho personas residentes en capitales y grandes urbes latinoamericanas que trazasen ‘su’ ciudad sobre un mapa, el tiempo que han vivido en ella y que le otorgasen un color preciso con el cual la identifican. Del mismo modo se les pidió que evaluarasen el aprecio que mantienen con ese espacio vital en una escala del 0 al 6 (siendo cero ‘ninguno’ y seis ‘incondicional’).

Escala emocional
Percepción



Escala geográfica
km



(Todos los mapas
están en la misma
escala geográfica)

